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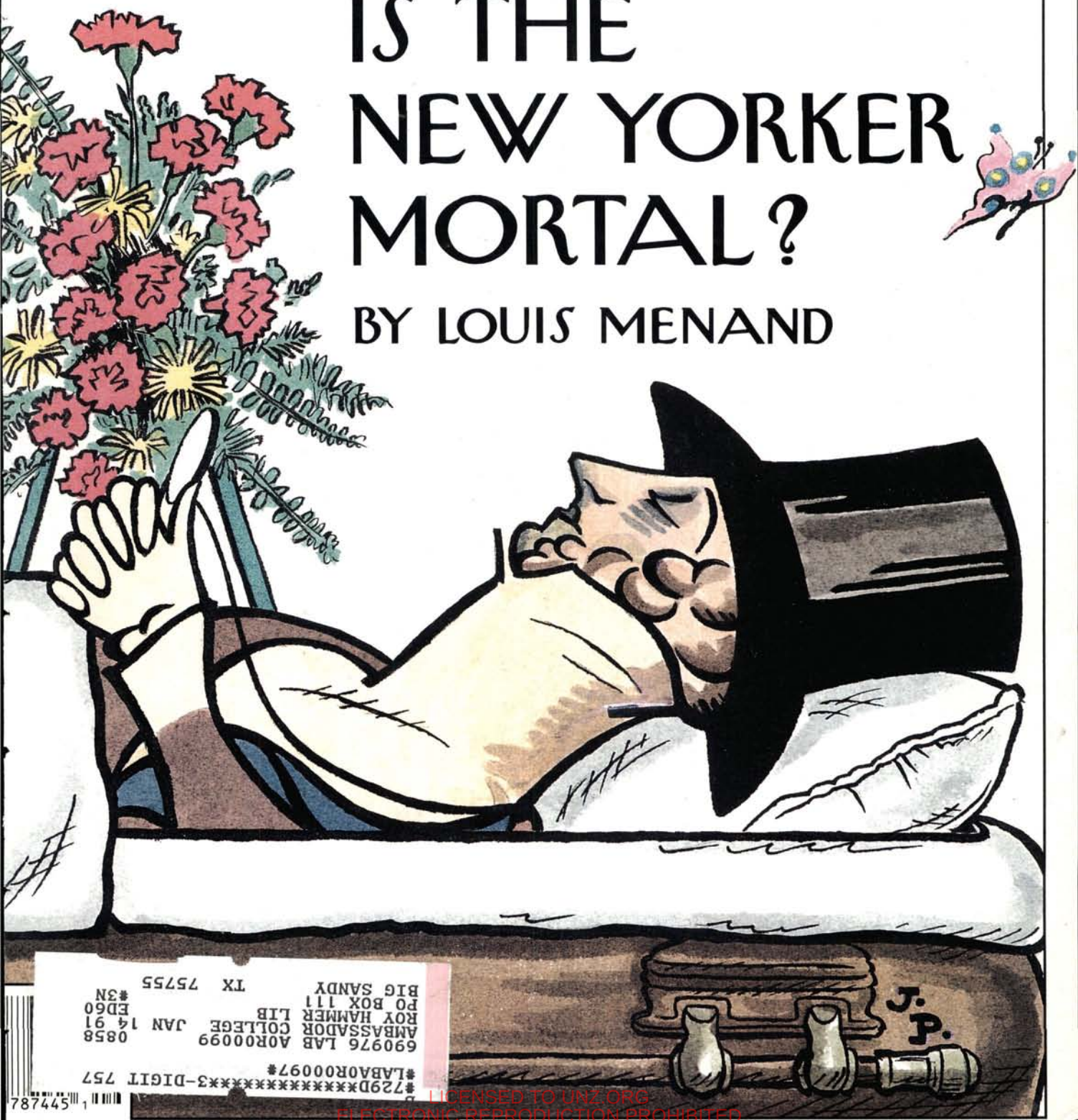
IS THE NEW YORKER MORTAL?

BY LOUIS MENAND



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A Weekly Journal of Opinion

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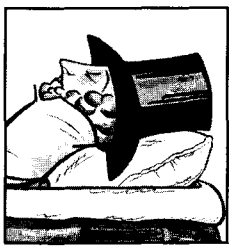

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FROM WASHINGTON

Second thoughts

Around the world, national theologies are crumbling: communism, apartheid, and, here in America, the worship of guns—to foreigners, the single craziest thing about us. Do you sense an outbreak of sanity about gun control? I do. There was retired Chief Justice Warren Burger preaching sacrilege on the cover of *Parade* magazine a couple of weeks ago. A *Time*/CNN poll reports that 87 percent of gun owners themselves favor a seven-day waiting period for handgun purchases; three-quarters favor registration of semiautomatic weapons and handguns; and half favor registration of rifles and shotguns.

Unfortunately, there is the Second Amendment to the Constitution: "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." As Sanford Levinson, a professor at Texas Law School, points out in the December *Yale Law Journal* (the article is called "The Embarrassing Second Amendment"), no prominent legal scholar has ever tackled this provision. The leading constitutional reference book dismisses it in a footnote.

Most right thinkers take comfort in that funny stuff about the militia. Since the amendment's stated purpose is arming state militias, they reason, it creates no individual right to own a gun—especially today when the only state militias are the National Guard. That reasoning is good enough for the ACLU. But would civil libertarians be so stinting in interpreting an amendment they felt more fond of? Say, the First?

The purpose of the First Amendment's free-speech guarantee was pretty clearly to protect political discourse. But liberals reject the notion that free speech is therefore limited to political topics, even broadly defined. True, that purpose is not inscribed in the amendment itself. But why leap to the conclusion that a broadly worded constitutional freedom ("the right of the people to keep and bear arms") is narrowly limited by its stated purpose, unless you're trying to explain it away?

That word "infringed" is also pesky. First Amendment freedoms, by contrast, may not be "abridged." Wouldn't you say (if you didn't know the subject matter) that a freedom guaranteed against mere "infringement" deserves at least as robust a reading as one protected only against actual "abridgement"? TNR's Mickey Kaus says that if liberals interpreted the Second Amendment the way they interpret the rest of the Bill of Rights, there would be law professors arguing that gun ownership is mandatory.

Of course the hypocrisy is not just on one side. Second Amendment enthusiasts tend to be the sort who, in other contexts, are horrified at the thought of unelected judges overruling the will of the majority. They are happy to see other folks' dubious enthusiasms suppressed for the alleged good of society. Guns don't kill people—only pornography, drugs, etc., etc., kill people. But this doesn't free liberals to be hypocritical ourselves.

The most thorough parsing of the Second Amendment is a 1983 article in the *Michigan Law Review* by Don Kates, a gun enthusiast. Kates expends most energy demonstrating that at the time of the Bill of Rights, the word "militia" did not mean a separate, organized military force. All able-bodied men were considered to be part of the "militia" and were expected to defend the state if necessary. I'm not sure this is as clinching an argument as Kates seems to think. The fact that once upon a time everyone was a member of the militia doesn't prove that everyone still has a right to a gun even after the composition of the militia has changed.

But Kates has other bullets in his belt. The phrase "right of the people" appears four other times in the Bill of Rights (including the First Amendment). In all these other cases, everyone agrees that it creates a right for *individual citizens*, and not just some collective right of states as a whole. Then there is the phrase "keep and bear." The right merely to "bear" arms might just mean serving in the militia. But what does "keep" mean? Finally, Kates marshals impressive historical evidence that the Second Amendment, like other Bill of Rights protections, was intended to incorporate English common law rights of the time, which pretty clearly included the right to keep a gun in your home for reasons having nothing to do with the militia.

So there we are. If there is a good reply to Kates's fusillade, the controllers haven't made it. In a videotape distributed by Handgun Control, Inc. (of which I'm a member) for use in high schools, Harvard Law professor Alan Dershowitz blusters that "asking about what the Framers would have done about handguns is absurd. No one can know." He compares it to another modern development, wiretapping. It's an unfortunate example. The Supreme Court has ruled—and even Robert Bork agrees—that, reasoning by analogy, the Framers would have wanted the Fourth Amendment's protection against "unreasonable searches and seizures" to apply to wiretapping.

Of course the existence of an individual right to own guns doesn't mean that it is absolute. What are the limits? In the Supreme Court's one 20th-century treatment of the Second Amendment in 1939, it held somewhat ambiguously that sawed-off shotguns aren't necessarily protected by the Constitution without proof that they are the kind of weapon a militia might have used. Working from that decision and the common law, Kates says the amendment's protection should be limited to weapons "in common use among law-abiding people," useful for law enforcement or personal defense, and lineally descended from weapons known to the Framers. (No nuclear bombs.) He adds that they must be light enough for an ordinary person to carry ("bear"), and even that they can't be especially "dangerous or unusual." He says—NRA take note—that the amendment places no limit on mandatory registration or laws against concealed weapons in public (since state militias were required to produce their guns for inspection).

This list seems quite reasonable and moderate, though where it all comes from is not all that clear. In suggesting, for example, that it would be OK to ban automatic rifles but not semiautomatics, he is slicing the constitutional salami pretty thin. But in what I suspect was the main purpose of his exercise—establishing that a flat ban on handguns would be hard to justify under the Constitution—Kates builds a distressingly good case.

The downside of having a Bill of Rights is that the protection of individual rights usually entails social costs. This is as true of the Second Amendment as it is of the First, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth. The downside of having those rights inscribed in a Constitution, protected from the whims of majority rule, is that they can't be redefined as life changes. It would be remarkable indeed if none of the Bill of Rights became less sensible and more burdensome with time. Talking and writing are as central to American politics as they ever were; shooting just isn't. Gun nuts are unconvincing (at least to me) in their attempts to argue that the individual right to bear arms is still as vital to freedom as it was in 1792. But the right is still there.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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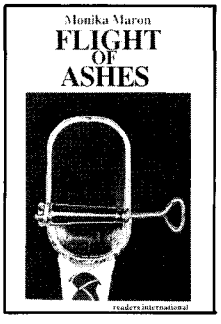

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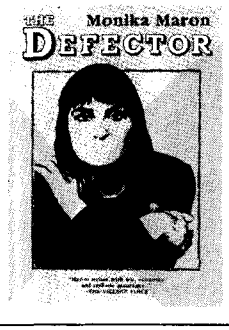

The Defector (041) by Monika Maron, **East Berlin**
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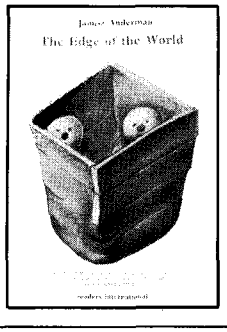

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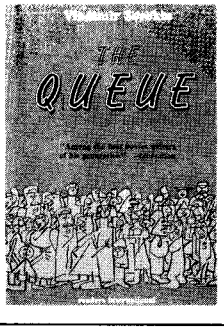

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CORRESPONDENCE

Yen for accuracy

To the editors:

In "The Japanese Megaphone" (January 22), John B. Judis reveals that academics, lawyers, and think tanks receiving Japanese funds are thereby transformed into a conspiracy to dupe unwary Americans into resisting protectionist trade policies. Never mind that free trade has brought unmatched prosperity; TNR reveals it is all a Japanese plot. Somehow, though, the article overlooked the most important part of this conspiracy: Americans who like sushi are especially untrustworthy.

Now that my pivotal role in this cabal has been unmasked, I wanted to assure the editors that from now on whenever I rise before an audience, I will have my rising-sun badge sewn securely on my lapel, and I will inform my audience that whatever I have to say, even if it should sound intelligent, should be dismissed as hopelessly corrupt. I will urge them to listen instead only to those who are in the pay of American employers and whose virtue, integrity, and patriotism are therefore untainted.

WILLIAM N. WALKER
New York, New York

To the editors:

John Judis's singular concern about conflicts of interest among Americans who receive money from Japanese corporations suggests that there is no reason to fear any bias among the other inhabitants of Washington academe who lobby for, advise, are employed by, or otherwise rely on funds provided by American corporations. In this regard Judis falls prey to the fallacy, first propounded by Calvin Coolidge and subsequently restated by GM's "Engine," Charlie Wilson, that the interests of American corporations coincide with the interests of the United States. Especially now that American corporations are global, there is no reason to assume that the company line on managed trade, industrial policy, or any other issue of national economic concern better corresponds to the interests of Americans than the position propounded by a Japanese corporation actively producing and researching in the United States.

ROBERT B. REICH
Cambridge, Massachusetts

To the editors:

The "hidden Japan lobby" that John B. Judis seeks to uncover may or may not be responsible for a less-than-draconian U.S. Government reaction to our trade deficit, but he should not have inferred its presence from my criticism of the 1986 U.S.-Japan Semiconductor Pact. From its inception, I felt strongly that the agreement would primarily benefit Japanese companies at substantial costs to U.S. computer, telecommunication, business equipment, and automobile companies.

I supported a critical element of the agreement—that of increasing U.S. company market share in Japan—and urged the toughest possible U.S. trade policy to effect that end. The essence of my criticism was and still is with the creation of a U.S. Government-sponsored cartel for semiconductors (now joined in by the European Community), which led to soaring costs for virtually all users, critical shortages of chips, windfall profits for Japanese companies, and no visible gain in U.S. semiconductor competitiveness. In any event, no one paid or implicitly encouraged me to speak out.

Although not in vogue in 1986, the list of public critics who seek reform of the semiconductor pact now includes most of the major users and some of the very companies who lobbied the Administration to negotiate the agreement. If changes to the price-fixing elements of the pact are made, chalk it up to the hard lessons learned from bad experience and not from any hidden conspiracy funded by Japanese companies. They're doing just fine, thanks in large measure to the agreement Judis apparently believes they attempted to prevent.

LIONEL H. OLMER
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

To say that "Japanese money is . . . creating a subtle climate of corruption" is a ludicrous exaggeration. The Japanese are not creating this climate of corruption; they are merely *exploiting* it. As Judis points out, no self-respecting Japanese lawyer would work for an American company attempting to influence Japanese trade policy. But lobbying for foreign governments and private interests is merely one of the sources of our parasitic lawyers' ill-gotten wealth.

Let's be fair and accurate. *We* created the climate of corruption. Foreigners like the Japan lobby merely exploit what is standard modus operandi in the United States: the sale of political influence, votes, and intellectual opinions if the price is right.

C. W. GRIFFIN
Phoenix, Arizona

To the editors:

John Judis implies that studies at the Institute of International Economics have minimized the importance of Japanese trade barriers. To the contrary, while most of our work reinforces the widely held view that exchange rates and other macroeconomic phenomena are much more important in explaining America's trade deficit with Japan, we have also derived very substantial effects for Japan's barriers—Judis himself cites an Institute estimate of $5 billion to $8 billion—and urged maximum efforts to eliminate them.

Judis also implies that our results were somehow affected by their partial funding by the United States-Japan Foundation, an American organization. Neither it nor any of our other funders, domestic or foreign, have ever attempted to influence our research. We would immediately reject both the attempt and the funds if any ever did.

Finally, Judis correctly quotes me as chastising any research center that would compromise its independence and integrity through its dealings with its funders. However, he incorrectly implies that I applied that criticism to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I of course am not privy to the practices of that or any institution other than my own, so I neither could nor would address their specific situations.

C. FRED BERGSTEN
Director, Institute for International Economics
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

"The Japanese Megaphone" contained glaring inaccuracies relating to an endowed chair appointment at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. As a fundamental principle of integrity, CSIS does not consult the donors of any of our five chairs at any stage in the selection process. Applicants are solicited through a nationwide search. The holder of the Japan chair was nominated by a search committee, which consulted 33 outside academicians. The donor of the chair was informed only after the invitation had been extended to the candidate and the candidate had accepted.

Total intellectual freedom is an explicit condition of appointment to the CSIS Japan chair. The two-year occupants of the Japan chair have been outstanding scholars of international reputation and would have accepted it on no other basis.

DAVID M. ABSHIRE
President, CSIS
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

In its references to me, "The Japanese Megaphone" has it wrong. Although the firm in which I am a partner has substan-

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

FEBRUARY 26, 1990

THE STATES OF THE UNIONS

The United States does not need a fundamental change of system, as do the Soviet Union and South Africa. So the United States does not, strictly speaking, need a leader of the vision and courage of a Mikhail Gorbachev or an F. W. de Klerk. And the United States does not have such a leader, as George Bush demonstrated in his first State of the Union message. But if Gorbachev and de Klerk are riding gigantic waves of history and are desperately trying to catch the curl, Bush and America seem to think of themselves as being wafted along by gentle breezes that challenge the helmsman only to keep an even keel, steer a steady course, and whistle a cheery tune.

The changes announced in the Soviet Union and in South Africa are epic and hopeful—evidence that the glorious revolution of 1989 is cascading into 1990, and into both the heartland of communism and the world's foremost racist police state. The stunning changes Gorbachev has pushed through the Central Committee of the Communist Party—the abandonment of the Party's constitutionally mandated "leading role" and the acceptance in principle of a multiparty system and of private ownership of farms and factories—are a long way from implementation. But their potential is clear and unmistakable: if followed to their logical conclusion, they will amount to nothing less than the abolition of Soviet communism. Gorbachev is on the point of grasping that he may have to sacrifice his Party if he wishes to save his country (and himself). His ambition has grown even grander: he now wishes, evidently, to become not only the greatest Soviet leader but also the last—and, if he can survive, the first leader of a new, pluralist Russian federation. In South Africa, meanwhile, de Klerk has embarked on a similarly daring journey, announcing steps that, if fulfilled, promise an end to the infamous system of apartheid.

It's true, as skeptics rightly maintain, that both *perestroika* and "Pretoriastroika" are responses to necessity, not the first choices of either Gorbachev, the Communist Party apparatchik, or de Klerk, the Nationalist Party functionary. The Soviet Union, without reform, will surely collapse into a Third World sinkhole. South Africa is increasingly isolated from the world and is faltering economically under international sanctions and a steady decline of foreign investment.

It's also true that each country faces problems so daunting that the odds have to be counted against a stable, peaceful future. Unlike the peoples of most of Eastern Europe, those of the Soviet Union have no experience with multiparty politics or market economics. It could be said, as Gorbachev told the Central Committee, that parties of a sort already exist—the Gorbachev reformers, the Yeltsin radicals, and the Ligachev conservatives, plus right-wing Russian nationalist fringe groups and secessionist parties in all the provinces. Can these contending forces really resolve their differences in national elections, when some will want the outcome to be the outright dissolution of the Soviet Union, and others a union administered from Moscow? And can the Soviet Union make a transition to private property and market capitalism when it will surely mean frighteningly unfamiliar short-term hardships—especially unemployment and higher prices—and when Gorbachev's half-steps toward economic *perestroika* are universally perceived to have failed?

In South Africa the problems immediately ahead are even scarier. Right-wing whites are already resorting to

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violence at the prospect of whites sharing power with blacks, the goal that is built into the logic of de Klerk's legalization of the African National Congress and the promise of negotiations. The anti-apartheid movement is also likely to split over whether to negotiate something less than unfettered black majority rule and whether to abandon the "armed struggle." There is every possibility that the situation could develop into a civil war provoked by extremists on either side.

And yet one hopes that the spirit that knocked down the Berlin Wall last year and freed Eastern Europe will prevail. The democratic spirit is not a vacuous abstraction. It led to the 1986 American sanctions against Pretoria—passed over the veto of a popular President—which shocked South Africa's political system into seeing the necessity for reform. Prevailing in Eastern Europe, and attracting Western investment, it undoubtedly encouraged Gorbachev to move ever more decisively away from communism.

Here in the United States, we are blessed with a system that works to give us liberty and—most of us, anyway—prosperity. Yet because we are not faced with clear and present evidence of the necessity for fundamental change, President Bush seems to think that we can make do with nothing more than cosmetic dustings.

Bush's State of the Union speech was notable chiefly as a quiet declaration of ideological independence from his immediate predecessor. The long struggle for control of the White House between "movement conservatives" and "pragmatists" has ended in decisive victory for the pragmatists. Absent were any references to right-to-life amendments, school prayer amendments, flag-burning amendments, or balanced-budget amendments. Nor did Bush inveigh against the threats of pornography, judicial activism, or secular humanism. Instead he attacked racism and devoted much of his speech to implicitly acknowledging that the country does indeed have problems, not all of which can be blamed on too much government. He attributed the changes in the Soviet Union to the bipartisan containment policy of the past 40 years, not to the ballooning defense budgets of the past ten. The very name of Ronald Reagan went unpronounced—except by Speaker of the House Tom Foley, who, in the Democrats' reply, slyly quoted the former President's thoughts on freedom.

The opinion polls make it clear that Bush is in tune with the public mood. He's popular, and he responds to public and political pressure as required to stay that way. His thoroughly reactive approach to the Presidency is, for the moment, sufficient to maintain his popularity, and he has no intention of risking his standing by vain endeavors to defend even his own previously avowed principles.

The catch is that the United States does face problems that, if mercifully not on a level with those of Moscow and Pretoria, nonetheless require serious action. They include: increasing the nation's productivity so that the economy can grow and its people can find jobs and a richer life; reversing the descent of the underclass into perpetual poverty; and revising the country's national security strategy to account for the revolutionary changes under way in the East bloc. Bush alluded to these in his State of the Union, but allusion is no substitute for creative action.

Bush responded to the changed European security situation by recommending deeper cuts in U.S. and Soviet forces in Europe—from 566,000 on the Soviet side and 300,000 on the American to equal levels of 225,000 on each, of which 195,000 would be in Central Europe. As far as it goes, this is a distinct improvement on Bush's previous proposal, which called for 275,000 on each side.

But it doesn't go far enough. The Bush proposal acknowledges change, but it still reflects an essentially static model rather than a dynamic one. At a time when the countries of Central Europe are moving full tilt toward independence, and when Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland are calling for the total withdrawal of Soviet troops from their soil, the old paradigm of two superpowers negotiating how many troops they will permit each other to station on other people's territory is, to put it mildly, obsolete.

Bush should have made it clear that the wishes of freely elected governments in all parts of Europe—and not U.S.-Soviet talks in Vienna—will ultimately determine how many troops should be stationed in Europe. Negotiations between the superpowers are fine as long as they are seen as a means to that end, but the last thing the United States should do is provide an excuse for the Soviets to continue occupying territory outside its borders. The goal is not 225,000 foreign troops on each side, or 100,000 troops, or zero troops. The goal, in the words of President Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia, is "a Europe that is a friendly community of independent states, a stable Europe, a Europe that does not need protection from superpowers because it is capable of defending itself by constructing its own security system."

If that "friendly community" or any of its members freely decides that American but not Soviet troops should be part of its security system—and that clearly is the present disposition of all the allies—then we hope that the American people will freely decide to keep them there, in such numbers as NATO collectively deems advisable. In no case should the Administration allow the principle of equal force levels to drive the United States out of Europe; a huge Soviet army will remain in European Russia even if it leaves Eastern Europe. These are the terms in which the Administration should be thinking and talking, rather than lurching from one static and arbitrary number to the next.

Even allowing for the fact that events have been moving too swiftly for the enormous Pentagon bureaucracy to keep up with them, many Congressional experts are disappointed that President Bush not only has presented a defense budget calling for continued piddling two percent annual reductions over the next five

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years, but also has failed to provide a plan for how that money would be spent. We share that disappointment.

In domestic areas, even more, the Bush performance was less than inspiring. The U.S. economy cannot become competitive and productive so long as the nation's savings rate is one of the lowest in the industrialized world. Bush's proposed "family savings plan" is no answer, providing even less incentive to save than Individual Retirement Accounts. The answer is that the biggest dis-saver in the country—the U.S. Government—has to get off its borrowing binge. Yet Bush is proposing a capital gains tax cut that will widen the federal deficit and, at the same time, make an already regressive tax system even more so. After a decade of wild deficit spending in which the tax burden (which has not been cut) has been steadily transferred from the well-off to the less well-off, Dr. Bush has come up with his prescription: another massive tax giveaway to the rich. This is disgraceful.

Budget director Richard Darman, in an introduction to the fiscal 1991 Bush budget document, now discloses that the Government's burden of debt is even greater than commonly understood. Hidden liabilities—which he jokingly calls "Pac-Men"—threaten to eat up future revenues, he writes. These include rising health care costs (which account for 11.2 percent of GNP, the highest of any industrialized country), unfunded federal retirement plans, obligations to clean up environmental messes at federal facilities, and risks under federal credit and insurance programs. Darman estimates the total of all these at more than $400 billion over the next 30 years unless the programs are reformed or taxes are raised. Between the lines of his introduction, Darman seems to be crying out for an increase in taxes to make up the shortfall. But taxes, he notes dryly, "are not part of the President's program."

George Bush, the born-again supply-sider, is depending on a combination of economic growth, domestic cuts, and program changes—plus minimal defense savings for the foreseeable future—to pay the bills and also provide funds for "investment" in education, environmental cleanup, drug eradication, and improvement of the nation's infrastructure. A glance at Bush's budget confirms that the new amounts going to education, drugs, and the environment are dismally small. In the shiniest bauble in his speech, Bush proposed to expand Head Start so that it serves 70 percent of all eligible poor children, instead of 50 percent. Why is he not budgeting for 100 percent?

Instead of dollars, Bush thinks, he can get by with words and pretty pictures—pictures of "a better America, where there's a job for everyone who wants one . . . where everyone has a roof over his head and where the homeless get the help they need to live in dignity. . . . Where every street, every school, and every child is drug-free." And so on. Lacking the sense of crisis that prevails in other nations, the United States under George Bush is showing no signs of moving to act with dispatch to solve its problems. The problems, therefore, can only deepen.

DEAD MAN'S PEACE

It's a common enough event in the Arab world: innocents are murdered, and a handful of organizations, as if competing with the devil himself, claim the credit. That is what happened in Egypt last week. Nine Israeli civilians were killed (and 17 wounded) while on a tour bus 30 miles outside Cairo. Soon no fewer than three groups had put out statements boasting that their man had done the deed: a shadowy Egyptian organization and two Palestinian militias. (Three other winglets of the Palestinian revolution, two of them members in good standing of the PLO, then gave the crime their blessing.) One Palestinian has been arrested. The Egyptian police have announced, with unseemly relief, that the perpetrators of the crime are "Arabs speaking non-Egyptian Arabic." And for that reason, perhaps, they are pursuing the case with some diligence.

But Egypt and especially the Egyptian elites should not be let off the hook quite so easily. They have nurtured the atmosphere in which too many such crimes have been winked at. Indeed, they have distanced themselves from the peace with Israel in ways that can only encourage attacks on Israel's citizens. In the first post-war mass homicide of Israelis on October 6, 1985, after all, it was someone speaking Egyptian Arabic who fired the machine gun at tourists. Suleiman Khater was described by the police as a crazed soldier. But he quickly became a folk hero and then a hero to intellectuals and writers as well. Poems were written, songs were sung in his honor. When Khater committed suicide in jail, official and unofficial whisperers in Cairo hinted at the long arm of the Mossad. It would have been more appropriate to have hinted at interested Egyptians. What the elites never did was to push Egyptian society to acknowledge the symbolic reality of his crime. For too many, in fact, the killer, by murdering seven Israelis (four of them children) on a beach, had redeemed an Egypt defiled by its treaty with Israel. The government's regrets were perfunctory, its recompense grudging.

These two groups of victims, separated by five years' distance, are not the only Israelis to have been targeted by terror in Egypt. An Israeli diplomat was wounded in one attack, another killed in a second. The wife of a staffer at Jerusalem's Cairo embassy died after "unknowns" opened fire, gangland-style, on the Israeli pavilion in a Cairo book fair.

Egypt is a heavily monitored society. Crimes like these don't need to go unsolved or unpunished. But there's a curious shortage of zeal in pursuing the guilty. As many knowledgeable Egyptians will admit in private, one reason for this indifference is that some of the guilty are themselves of the elite. Thawrat Misr—"Egypt's Revolution"—is an organization that has been implicated in the slaying of Israelis and in other crimes as well. But it is virtually untouchable because its senior figure, its activ-

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ist celebrity, is Khalid Abdul Nasser, the elder son of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the revered godfather of postwar Pan-Arabism. Despite the disasters his rule brought on the Egyptians and other Arab peoples—the Six-Day War is just one instance—Nasser's memory is still honored because he held out the fantasy of conquest in a society besieged by social torments. Delusions continue to enchant and mesmerize; and their sponsor receives the homage due his successor, Anwar Sadat, who tried to ease Egypt's torments a bit by making peace with Israel.

Sadat is little honored these days in Egypt, least of all among the intellectual elite and the political class. The peace he won for them is a dead man's peace, a cold peace, a peace to be disdained. The members of these elites now claim the American aid that came with peace as a virtual birthright. But for them that aid seems to entail no obligations, and surely no obligation to deepen the peace with Israel and give it life and meaning. Peace is more than the cessation of shooting between armies. Israelis have invested enormous energy and imagination in this peace, already more than a decade old. There have been scientific and commercial initiatives, nearly all of them at Israel's instigation. A hundred thousand Israelis give tangible substance to their faith in this peace by visiting Egypt each year. It's doubtful if one percent of that number of Egyptians reciprocate.

Last summer Mona Gamal al-Din, an Egyptian filmmaker and documentarist—was dismissed from the Egyptian Filmmakers Union. This was her punishment for having gone to Jerusalem to participate in the annual film festival of the Israel Cinematheque. She was, she said, naive enough to think that she was participating in her country's peace with Israel. Her country—in which a filmmakers' organization is not a free and independent association—disagreed. Her expulsion was as telling a rejection of the peace with Israel as is the killing of Israelis. It was not an isolated incident, but an all-too-accurate expression of how the privileged Egyptian classes feel about a peace made by a Pharaoh and accepted by the lower orders only. There's a thin line between this cynical peace—which the Egyptian elites despise, even as they cherish the emoluments that go with it—and the murder of Israelis in the Sinai and in Cairo.

NOTEBOOK

THE WARNER WAFFLE: Senator John Warner of Virginia unfortunately missed the cutoff date for competition in the "Abortion Olympics" (see TNR, February 12), but he deserves an honorable mention for his recent performance anyway. Launching his re-election campaign, Elizabeth Taylor's former husband polymorphously called himself "pro-choice with limitations, pro-life with exceptions." Warner thus becomes the first candidate in the 1990 campaign cycle to embrace all possible positions in the same sentence. Bravo, Senator.

DOG BITES EDITORS: Complaints have been trickling in about our hipper-than-thou item on *Time*'s Arsenio Hall cover story (see "Jive Turkeys," Notebook, December 25, 1989). Christopher Porterfield, who edited the story for *Time*, writes: "I hope THE NEW REPUBLIC, so far out front on black idioms, will enlighten us all as to why 'roof!' is hipper than 'wooh!' " *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen instructs us that the audience chant Arsenio leads is neither "Wooh! Wooh! Wooh!" as *Time* had it, nor "Roof! Roof!" as we corrected it, but "Woof! Woof!" Cohen confirmed this with a spokesman for Arsenio, who told him that the cheer derives from Hall's hometown of Cleveland, where Browns' football fans sitting in the section of cheap seats known as the "dog pound" woof to express support for the team. Of course, whatever Arsenio says about this goes. But in our own defense, we'd like to note that the sound he makes is a dog's bark, variously transliterated in English as arf, woof, roof, or ruff. Take your pick. But whatever noise dogs make, they do not go wooh, wooh, except possibly at the offices of *Time*. We stand partially corrected.

BARBIE, MEET G.I. JOE:

Barb no Amazon fan
Women not up to combat roles, she feels

—*New York Daily News*, January 17

Women 'can shoot as well.
They can fly as well.' — Barbara Bush

Barbara Bush backs women's combat role

—*Miami Herald*, same day.
(thanks to William Saletan, Washington, D.C.)

SUN SHINES, SOURCES SAY: In a February 6 Metro story, Lynne Duke of the *Washington Post* reports that still-Mayor Marion Barry is keeping in daily touch with city officials from the Hazelden clinic, where he is receiving treatment for, ahem, alcoholism. "Friends have said the mayor also has a cocaine problem," the story notes. Maybe the *Post* should make that: "Reported friends have supposedly said that the reputed mayor has an alleged cocaine problem." You can't be too careful.

RADIO FREE NEW REPUBLIC: Readers in what bicoastal jet-set types call flyover country may already have caught "Headline Exchange," a daily five-minute radio debate that pits TNR editors against their counterparts at *National Review*. Featuring Hendrik Hertzberg,

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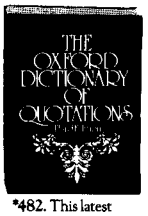

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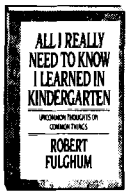

253. Fulghum's premise is that we learned the important lessons by age 5.
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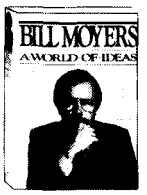

182. Moyers talks about everything from morality to science.
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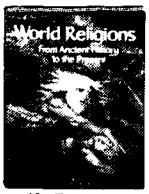

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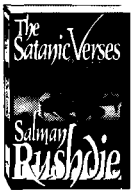

*406. "A rollercoaster ride over a vast landscape of the imagination."—*London Guardian.*
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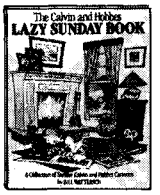

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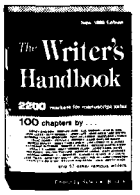

*256. What to write, how to write it, where to sell it.
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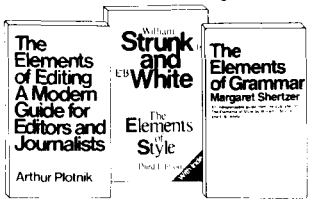
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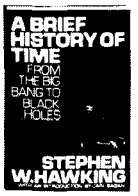

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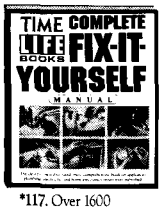

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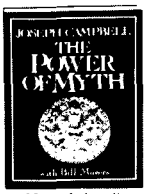

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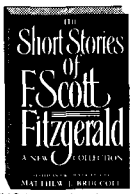

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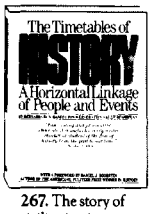

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The serious reader gets shelved.

McLIBRARIES

By Stephen Akey

At my local library in Brooklyn, bookshelves labeled "Romance," "Show Biz," and "Supernatural and UFOs," displaying their wares face forward, have replaced most of the stacks formerly arranged from 001 ("Knowledge") to 999 ("Extraterrestrial Worlds") under the quaint but efficient Dewey Decimal System. The idea is to replicate the look of a chain bookstore in order to attract "impulse" borrowers and increase circulation figures. But the kinds of books being displayed so prominently in "merchandised" libraries such as this one are not exactly repositories, as Cynthia Ozick has ruefully pointed out, of the best that is known and thought. Trash fiction, celebrity biographies, and diet fad books increasingly constitute the core collections of many of our public libraries.

The decline of public libraries began in the 1970s, largely as a response to severe budget cutbacks. Library directors and trustees reasoned that if they could boost circulation figures, thus proving the popularity of their institutions, they could justify their demands for the restoration or even increase of government funds. Given that libraries have never topped anyone's list of essential municipal services, this strategy worked about as well as any public library policy could at restoring cut funds. Charles Robinson, the director of the Baltimore County Public Library System, which pioneered many of today's library marketing techniques, recently distilled this quantitative reasoning in *Library Journal*: public libraries, he wrote, should abandon their "elitist" pretensions and strive to become "the McDonald's of information and materials distribution." Robinson's own library, apparently, is just such a McDonald's of the mind. Accompanying the article was a photo of him standing next to a book display case labeled "Summer Sizzlers," and featuring, to cite only the most distinguished, *Hot Money* by Dick Francis.

In fact, nothing is easier for libraries than increasing circulation by stocking the shelves with trash. Another recent article in *Library Journal*, by the assistant director of the Queensborough Public Library, boasted of the success of the newly merchandised branches of that library system and had tables of statistics to prove it. But there is another side of the story. Walk into any branch of the Queens Public Library and try to find a copy of, say, George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* or *The Portable Nietzsche*. More and more such books, if they're to be had at all, must be obtained through the time-consuming and restrictive process of interlibrary loan. Granted, neighborhood branches are not research libraries, but limited resources hardly justify the abandonment of serious readers.

The advent of videos has not helped. Although library directors pay lip service to the value of instructional and artistic videos, most of the movies found in a public library's audio-visual department are the same kinds of schlock found in stores. Videos don't attract significant numbers of new patrons to a whole range of library services. The only reason most would stop to pick up *The Karate Kid* at the library instead of 7-Eleven is that at the library it's free. For libraries videos are expensive, they do not have a long shelf life, and once the public catches on, the demand is insatiable. They do generate higher circulation figures and therefore more money, but even if spending for videos remains at its current low level of six percent of the materials budget (a somewhat dubious figure cited by non-print advocates), serious readers will have gained little: the additional funds are certainly not going for replacement sets of the OED.

In recent years libraries have scored many public relations points for their ever-expanding literacy programs. Especially when compared with library programs that have offered professional tips on makeup application (Louisville Public Library) or demonstrations of massage techniques for couples (Fayetteville, North Carolina, Public Library), reintegrating thousands of illiterate adults into society would seem an invaluable public service. The problem is that illiteracy is an extremely complex example of social dysfunction, quite beyond the scope of libraries to correct. Libraries simply house most of these literacy programs (which are administered, appropriately, by social workers and teachers)—and pay for them. The attempt, however well-intentioned, is yet another instance of public libraries trying to be all things to all people except the core of their traditional constituency: serious adult readers.

Why get into a lather about what's happening in public libraries? After all, Danielle Steel novels and Jackie O biographies are undeniably what most of the public want to read. No one, as far as I know, is arguing that public libraries should stop buying and making available popular and entertaining books. Yet traditionally libraries have maintained a balance between their functions as a leisure activity and as an educational resource. That balance, clearly, is threatened. More

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than a few people still hope to find serious books, adequate reference tools, perhaps even bibliographic data bases in their public libraries, and this minority deserves to be represented. Libraries receive tax money so that we may have a more informed citizenry, so that the general cultural level may be raised. If they are failing to fulfill these functions, government officials would be within their rights to apportion them fewer funds, not more.

We have all heard stories about writers whose course in life was set by their discovery of words and worlds at their local library. In an essay in the *New York Times Book Review*, Pete Hamill recalled his neighborhood branch in Brooklyn as "a place where most of the things I came to value as an adult had their beginnings. Art was there, poetry, history and words. Millions of words." The Park Slope branch, where Hamill ducked from neighborhood toughs and went from Howard Pyle to Marcus Aurelius, has added a special Danielle Steel rack, but it is still the kind of library where people can look up real books and have a chance of finding them. For now. But if it too becomes a mere merchandise mart with giveaways, we should not expect to hear a story like Hamill's 20 years from now.

STEPHEN AKEY is a librarian who has worked for the New York and Brooklyn Public Libraries.

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

THE DECEIVING LINE

By Fred Barnes

As far as the world knew, President Bush spent the afternoon of January 31 painstakingly rehearsing for his first State of the Union address to Congress that evening. He didn't. When John Sununu, the White House chief of staff, and national security adviser Brent Scowcroft briefed reporters on the substance of the speech, the session was piped into the Oval Office. Bush listened intently, particularly when Brit Hume of ABC asked how the President squared his new proposal for deeper cuts in American and Soviet troops in Eastern Europe with his repeated indications that he was sticking with his earlier proposal for less sweeping cuts. "I square that with the events that have taken place over the last couple of months," said Scowcroft.

Bush wasn't satisfied. He scratched out a note on green paper and had an aide hand-carry it to Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater in the White House press room. Bush wrote that Hume was wrong in quoting him as saying he wouldn't go beyond his first proposal, made last May, for cutting troops in Europe. "I don't remember that at all," Bush wrote. The "at all" was underlined. Fitzwater and Sununu read the note quickly, and Sununu rushed to the podium. "The President has not been saying that there would be nothing after the proposal he made last May to the Soviets," he said. "The President's never said that he would not discuss additional proposals, or not put forward additional proposals."

Sununu was literally correct, but he and Bush missed the point. The President has a penchant for secrecy and surprise. The political value of keeping an initiative secret, then springing it suddenly is obvious. The new troop reduction, from 275,000 to 195,000 on the American side, seemed all the more dramatic because Bush announced it unexpectedly. It also dolled up an otherwise forgettable (though, for Bush, well delivered) State of the Union address. But the point is what it took to keep the proposal from leaking and thus maintain the element of surprise. It took a lot. Maureen Dowd of the *New York Times* characterized White House efforts to hold down expectations for the speech as "misdirection." She was being kind. The White House actually used deception, or at least a form of it. Deception, in fact, is becoming a hallmark of the Bush Presidency.

Bush didn't exactly lie. But in the weeks before the State of the Union, he wittingly left the impression that he wouldn't go beyond his first proposal on conventional forces in Europe, known as CFE I. After his Malta summit with Mikhail Gorbachev, Bush stated this flatly to reporters in Brussels on December 4. "I'd like to get CFE I in the bank first—get it locked up, get those troops out, move down to equal levels [of] U.S. and Soviet forces. And so we ought to manage that before we start the architecture of something else. I want to see that done on time."

This statement was never revised by Bush. The CFE issue came up in Bush's press conference with French President François Mitterrand on December 16, but he declined to reveal any new thinking. Reconciling his stated position with the new proposal was no easy feat, but the White House managed. Sure, the new proposal looked like CFE II. It's not, insisted a senior Administration official. "It's part of CFE I, hopefully to be negotiated alongside it as long as it does not interfere with the current negotiations with CFE I." This hair-splitting may get Bush off the hook for lying, but not deceit. The Administration began "conceptually" considering further troop reductions "several months ago," said another senior official. By December 4, in other words. Rather than correct the false impression he'd created that his Administration wasn't mulling a deeper reduction, Bush exploited it.

In doing so, he put some of his underlings in an awkward position. Seven hours before the State of the Union, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney was interviewed on the TV show "American Interests." The interview wasn't to be broadcast for several days, but Cheney still

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felt compelled by Bush's personal order not to let the troop cut leak. (It did leak about the time Cheney was talking, but he didn't know this.) Asked if Bush might propose new reductions, a CFE II, Cheney said, "I'm not sure there will be a CFE II. There might be. But on the other hand there might not. . . . All of these decisions have to be worked out within the alliance. . . . We're spending a lot of time working on exactly these issues within NATO right now."

The NATO business was true, but not in the way Cheney was suggesting. Just that week, Deputy Secretary of State Larry Eagleburger and Robert Gates, Bush's deputy national security adviser, had crisscrossed Europe to advise leaders of NATO countries of Bush's new proposal. At the White House, some officials had a good excuse for having told reporters there was nothing exciting in Bush's speech. In the text that circulated for suggestions, the proposal wasn't included. This led one White House aide to inform a reporter flatly that there would be no new initiatives at all in the address.

This whole episode is part of a pattern at the Bush White House of knowingly pointing the press (and public) in the wrong direction, creating inaccurate impressions, and disingenuously explaining things away with clever or merely semantic arguments. When questioned about this practice, Bush defends secrecy. On January 5 he was asked at a press conference about Secretary of State James Baker's false statement that only one high-level mission had gone to China after the Tiananmen Square massacre. "Let me simply say that some things will be conducted in secrecy," he said. "And I know you don't like it." But secrecy, while often necessary in government, isn't the issue. Nor is lowballing, the common enough phenomenon of lowering expectations. The problem is deception.

Bush's overtures to China—entirely defensible overtures, I think—are an example. On June 20 Fitzwater announced that Bush had "directed that the U.S. Government suspend participation in all high-level exchanges of government officials with the People's Republic of China." To me and everyone else, this meant that high-level, bilateral contacts between the Bush Administration and Beijing were banned. The White House didn't dispute this. On December 11, the day after Scowcroft had toasted Chinese officials in Beijing, Fitzwater conceded that "high-level contacts were widely thought to be banned, but they weren't." It was, he said, "kind of a technical thing." Ten days later, after an earlier Scowcroft trip to China had been unearthed, Bush claimed he'd never prohibited contacts. "I didn't say that. I said no high-level exchanges. So please look at it carefully." Bush is literally correct. In practical effect, he employed a ruse for political protection while pursuing an unpopular policy.

Another example is the Malta summit with Gorbachev last December. On September 23 Bush announced that he and Gorbachev will meet for a summit in the United States in summer 1990. How about meeting sooner? "You might make a case that it could be sooner, but this was the agreed timetable, and it's agreeable to us," Bush said, and left it at that. Five days earlier Bush had said he "felt under no rush" to meet with Gorbachev. As it turns out, Bush had proposed the Malta summit in a letter to the Soviet leader in July. When he spoke in September, the final details for the summit were being worked out. I suppose Bush has a semantic dodge. The White House portrayed Malta as a meeting, not a summit. It's a distinction that again might absolve Bush of lying, but not of deception. Bush had trouble playing along with the distinction. By the time he got to Malta, he'd abandoned it. Asked how things were going with Gorbachev, Bush replied, "The summit's going just fine, thanks."

During the run-up to Malta, Bush blurred the two definitions of "agenda" to promote secrecy and surprise. On November 28 he was asked if he would present concrete proposals to Gorbachev. That's one definition of agenda, a plan, a set of proposals. Bush answered that "there's no set agenda. [We're] prepared to talk about a wide array of issues." His response dealt with the structure of the talks, the schedule, the agreed-upon agenda for the discussions. And there wasn't such an agenda. Bush had an agenda of his own, however: 21 separate proposals that he laid out to Gorbachev in his opening monologue at Malta. Bush wanted these to be a surprise. They were, partly because he'd assured reporters on November 28 that "there won't be a surprise. That may come as a surprise."

On Air Force One on February 2, Bush joked about his "propensity for secrecy." The American people, he said, "understand that things have to be conducted in secrecy." Bush said he doesn't worry about secrecy "as long as we don't deliberately mislead somebody." Mr. President, start worrying. •

PANAMA POSTCARD

DAY OF THE GRINGO

By Andres Oppenheimer

PANAMA CITY

Manuel A. Noriega is not the only general whose smiling portrait has vanished from public offices and schools in recent weeks. The U.S.-backed government of President Guillermo Endara is removing any vestige of the late military leader General Omar Torrijos, the man who has been glorified by military-civilian regimes over the past two decades as the founding father of Panamanian nationalism.

The Torrijos International Airport is now once again Tocumen Airport. A huge mural of Torrijos in

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the National Assembly building has been torn down. The Torrijos Foundation building and the Casa del Recuerdo (House of Memories) Torrijos Museum have been dismantled. All commemorative coins with Torrijos's image may be removed from circulation, and all sports arenas, public buildings, and avenues that are still named after him will be renamed. All textbooks with Torrijos's picture on their covers have been withdrawn. And Panama's new education minister says she will instruct teachers to use the word "dictatorship" to describe the period between the October 1968 coup that brought Torrijos to power and the December 1989 U.S. invasion that ousted Noriega. (The new education authorities, by the way, have devised a complex formula to avoid using the word "invasion" in the classrooms: the arrival of U.S. troops will be referred to as the "liberating military action that, to the extent that it allows us to consolidate internally, will guarantee national sovereignty.")

The purging of Torrijos—or Omar, as he was most often referred to on official billboards—from Panama's institutional memory is one of the most daring political moves by the Endara government. But it may not have been the smartest one. Although an overwhelming number of Panamanians opposed Noriega, many remember Torrijos with some affection. It was during the Torrijos era in the early 1970s that Panama lived one of its last periods of economic bonanza. The late strongman, who died in a 1981 plane crash, used the army's manpower—and generous loans from foreign bankers—to build rural roads, schools, and hospitals. He propelled himself to stardom in Panama's history books by negotiating the 1977 Panama Canal treaties, under which the canal and U.S. military bases next to it are to be returned to Panama by 2000.

Panama's nationalists, unable to rally around the unpopular figure of Noriega, are happy to have the memory of Torrijos. They say that Torrijismo will make a comeback soon, when it becomes clear that Washington will not pour billions of dollars into Panama and the gringos' presence here becomes a nuisance. Endara government spokesmen shrug off such speculation: Torrijos was a dictator, they insist, and Panamanians have had it with dictators.

Few Panamanians dispute the results of a recent Gallup Poll showing that 89 percent of their countrymen support the U.S. invasion. Seven weeks after Noriega's ouster, residents are still taking pictures of themselves with U.S. Marines and waving at the gringo soldiers on the streets. But there are indications that the euphoria may soon dissipate.

Take the case of the education minister, Ada de Gordon, a rabid foe of the Noriega regime who was among the first to cheer the arrival of U.S. troops. De Gordon, the only woman and the only black in Panama's new Cabinet, drove to the airport with other officials on January 23 to welcome Endara from his first trip abroad as president. Her car was stopped by U.S. troops at a roadblock outside the airport. She presented her presidential palace ID card identifying her as a Cabinet minister. But a U.S. soldier told her he was sorry, he had instructions not to let anybody pass. The minister and her entourage were forced to turn back. "I felt sore," she said later that day. "Being told what to do by a foreign soldier in your own country can be very traumatic." De Gordon is convinced that it won't be long before students and labor leaders begin demanding a quick withdrawal of the Americans. "If there's an accumulation of little incidents like the one that happened to me, there could be a change in the national mood," she says.

For the time being, however, most Panamanians seem more concerned about their personal security than about their nation's sovereignty. That's because robbers in post-invasion Panama are having a field day. The prisons were emptied by the Noriega regime during the fighting that followed the U.S. intervention, leaving hundreds of criminals free. The old army has been disbanded, the new one is not yet organized enough to patrol the streets effectively, and there are not enough U.S. soldiers to do police work. Panama City's streets are largely unprotected.

Criminals are better armed than ever: U.S. forces seized 80,000 weapons from Noriega regime arms depots in the early days of the invasion, but many more have not been recovered. In late December U.S. troops set up street stands where they paid $150 for every AK-47 rifle—no questions asked. But if you hadn't found an AK-47 in the looting that followed the U.S. intervention and you still wanted one, you could lurk a few yards in front of the U.S. Army's stands, offer $160, and it was yours.

Among the most recent robberies was the attack by seven heavily armed men on the posh "1985" Swiss restaurant. They stormed into the restaurant at dinnertime, forced all the customers to lie on the floor, emptied the cash register, and collected wallets and watches. That robbery came shortly after several gunmen armed with AK-47s and grenades seized a downtown Bancomer bank branch at midmorning and left with $100,000 in cash. Neighborhoods where Americans live have become a favorite target. One night two men knocked on the door of the home of William J. Joyce, aged 56, the top financial official of the Panama Canal bureaucracy. After a member of his family opened the door, they shot Joyce dead and left with three rifles from his arms collection and his wife's jewelry.

Some U.S. reporters have learned about the crime wave the hard way. When two visiting journalists from *Newsweek* and the *Wall Street Journal* asked a passer-by on the street if he could point them toward a black-market store of stolen goods, the man said, "Sure, follow me." Minutes later, the two reporters found themselves in a dark courtyard of a rundown housing project, with more than a dozen men surrounding them and a gun pointed at their heads. They were let go after delivering their money and watches.

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The latest pastime for Panamanian motorists is flagrantly ignoring the directions of traffic cops. After 22 years of military-run regimes, the little game has become the drivers' vendetta against a long list of excesses by the now defunct Panama Defense Forces. There is little the traffic cops can do: they cannot yet issue tickets—new forms must be printed—and in most cases they don't carry any weapons. In their new olive-green uniforms, absent belts, holsters, or arms, they look like Boy Scouts on their first Sunday outing.

The Endara government is naturally nervous about giving traffic cops—or any other soldiers in the new Panama Public Force (PPF)—any weapons: virtually all of the PPF's 13,000 members are former members of Noriega's Defense Forces. (According to government figures, the PPF is made up of more than 900 re-enlisted officers of Noriega's 1,069-officer Defense Forces.) Officials fear that arming the PPF with rifles could pose a more immediate danger to the new government than the common criminals the soldiers are supposed to combat. They say they will gradually provide weapons to the troops, as backgrounds are checked for involvement in human rights abuses during the Noriega years.

The hottest debate in Panama today is whether the country needs a new army at all. The controversy over the PPF has created a rift between the Endara government and many of its key supporters, including the Roman Catholic Church and the anti-Noriega Civic Crusade coalition, which are opposed to any armed service bigger than a police force. The dispute burst into the open during Endara's first state of the union address, hosted by the Civic Crusade, the coalition that led the fight against Noriega over the past three years. Fernando Boyd, head of the Civic Crusade and the man in charge of introducing the new president to the packed auditorium at Panama's Atlapa convention center, said the coalition is "totally opposed to any military structure other than a national police force." Many in the audience nodded approvingly.

The Civic Crusade argues that, by training a new Public Force with military capabilities, the Endara government and U.S. advisers are creating a new monster. According to Boyd, "We are repeating the mistakes of the past." In the 1960s U.S. military advisers began training a small Panamanian police force. That force ended up running Panama itself. Panama shares borders with only Colombia and Costa Rica, two nations with which it has long lived in peace. And as for the argument that Panama must prepare itself to defend the canal after 2000, anti-army advocates say the Panama Canal treaties would allow U.S. troops to intervene if the waterway were threatened after that date. The Civic Crusade wants Panama to follow in the steps of Costa Rica: declare itself a neutral country, and abolish its army.

The Endara government, choosing its words carefully, says the PPF will be "mostly" a police force. But it will have two companies of better-equipped troops to help protect the country's borders, face possible guerrilla threats, and help guard the canal against sabotage attacks once the waterway is turned over to Panama.

Colonel Eduardo Herrera Hassan, the former Miami exile turned chief of the PPF, is going out of his way not to look like the creator of a new military dynasty. He walks around unarmed, quotes the speeches of his civilian bosses, and displays indifference to military honors—he still hasn't had his colonel's badge sewn to his uniform because "I didn't have time to think about it." But he has no use for the idea of a Costa Rican-type police force. "The Americans did us a favor this time, but we can't call them every time we have a problem," he says. "At some point, they will have to withdraw, and we will have to take over their responsibilities."

As the debate rages, a new bumper sticker is spreading fast in Panama City. It says, "*Policia sí, Ejército no*" (Police yes, Army no). Traffic cops, most of whom were Noriega Defense Forces soldiers until the U.S. invasion, stand by impassively as the anti-army motorists zoom past them. But many Panamanians are already detecting a cynical we'll-get-even look in the policemen's eyes.

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WASHINGTON SCENE

BRIGHT LIGHTS, SPIN CITY

By Jacob Weisberg

You are not the kind of reporter who would be at a place like this at this time in the evening. But here you are, and you cannot say that anyone forced you to come. You are talking to a Congressman about the State of the Union. He is either Newt Gingrich or Dick Gephardt. You are unsure. All might come clear if you could just go home and watch "Nightline." Then again, it might not.

The Congressman is criticizing the address because it was too vague. This is his spin on it. "I left the room knowing the state of the world," he says. "But I didn't know if I knew America's place in it." You realize that he is Congressman Gephardt and that he wants you to quote this remark.

Congressman Gephardt is the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time in the evening. He observes the Gephardt rule of perpetual motion: one

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quote per minute. "There was much pleasing rhetoric," he says. "What it failed to capture were specific ideas for revitalizing the economy." Gephardt's mission in life is to get quoted more often than anyone else in Washington, and this involves a lot of moving around, since there is always the likelihood that someone is catching up with you. Gephardt and other famous statesmen hop from one station to the next. There are 21 stops in all, representing network, cable, and local stations. New fiber-optic technology makes it possible for all of them to broadcast at once.

It is bright and noisy and crowded in the pigpen. This is what the insiders call it. After being contained in the House chamber for the length of the President's lecture, Senators explode out of the Speaker's Lobby and stampede down the marble steps. They come snorting and halting into Statuary Hall, where the crews have their cameras set up. It occurs to you that this is like the running of the bulls in Pamplona. You have never seen the running of the bulls, but this is what you imagine it must be like.

Next to the statue of Francis H. Pierpoint, Senators are waiting in line to talk to a television reporter. Senator Metzenbaum is growing impatient. But before long it is his turn. Mary Norton from Gillett news service asks him what he thought about what the President said. "I thought some parts of it were very good. He talks about bringing home 195,000 troops. Excuse me. Do it over," he says. "Whaddya think?" Mary Norton asks him again. "I thought that some parts of it were good," the Senator says. You wonder if Francis H. Pierpoint, whoever he was, would have approved of all this.

Senator Gore is next in line. He is laughing because he doesn't know what station he is talking to. Mary Norton does not know either because Gillett sends live feed to stations around the country. Now Gore is laughing too hard to give his spin on the speech. Then he pulls himself together. "We need fiscal realism to go with the rhetoric," he says. "As we wade through the details we'll certainly be watching for that. Next! Next!" It is Senator Levin's turn. "Ask him about tailpipe standards," Senator Gore hollers to Mary Norton. "Ask him about tailpipe standards." But she does not. She asks him about the speech. "On the domestic side there is still a gap between the rhetoric and the reality," Senator Levin says. A small voice inside you insists that new fiber-optic technology is not such a good thing.

Now it is Newt Gingrich's turn to talk to Mary Norton. Newt Gingrich sounds like a character from a Dr. Seuss book. The Gingrich Who Stole Christmas. But you know he is really a Republican Congressman. A Republican Congressman with big hair. He is the kind of guy who would love a speech by George Bush. "It was a very dominant speech. This is a man who is imposing his vision and his values on the '90s," he says. "And I think it's going to work." Afterward you stop Newt Gingrich for an interview. "It was a very dominant speech," he says to you. "George Bush is imposing his vision and values on the '90s." You have heard this somewhere before, but you do not stop him.

You keep hearing variations on the same joke from Democrats. "It was a Democratic speech with a Republican budget," Pat Schroeder says. "A great Democratic speech," Steny Hoyer says. "Unfortunately it follows the submission of a Republican budget." Bill Gray says: "I think his State of the Union ought to be introduced to his budget." You are not sure who came up with this line first. Probably Pat Schroeder. She is a real card.

It's somewhere past 11. The glare from the klieg lights is blinding. Most of the Senators you were talking to have already gone home to bed. It occurs to you that anyone still trying to get quoted is probably a media slut. You wonder if you are a media slut too. Probably you are. You are still listening to Congressman Gephardt.

He is still talking. •

De Klerk and 'Pretoriastroika.'

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

By Robert K. Massie Jr.

Early in January the liberal Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa (IDASA) played host to the first two Russian academics to visit South Africa in nearly 40 years. Professors Irena Filatova and Apollon Davidson of Moscow State University toured the country giving talks about Soviet foreign policy in Southern Africa and about the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the U.S.S.R. To their surprise, their account met with indignant resistance. At one gathering in a Transvaal township more than 100 local leaders and citizens sharply questioned the Russians about this rejection of socialism, and criticized IDASA for bringing them to South Africa.

The reaction of the township activists to the Russians' visit gives one indication of the complexity of the task facing State President F. W. de Klerk and the leaders of the African National Congress as they careen toward the opening of negotiations. During the five months since de Klerk formally took office he has systematically altered South Africa's political landscape with a carefully timed sequence of symbolic and substantive actions. He has released eight leaders of the ANC, most of whom had been jailed for more than a quarter century. He allowed one of them, ANC leader Walter Sisulu, to be interviewed for an hour and a half on South African television, even though technically it was still an act of treason to quote a member of the ANC. He has announced the release of Nelson Mandela so frequently that both the press and the right wing are now completely used to the

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idea. He has bowed to the Mass Democratic Movement's fall Defiance Campaign and officially desegregated the vast, beautiful beaches of Cape Town, Durban, and Port Elizabeth just in time for the summer Christmas holidays. Then, in his opening speech to Parliament on February 2, he announced a wave of new reforms, including the unbanning of the ANC and several dozen other organizations, the limitation of detention without trial to six months, and the partial lifting of the government's restrictions on the media.

Most anti-apartheid activists in South Africa do not believe that de Klerk has reached the point of no return because "Pretoriastroika," as the papers are calling it, has not yet touched the central pillars of apartheid legislation. Citizens are still subject to the Population Registration Act, which requires every person in South Africa to obtain an official racial designation; to the Separate Amenities Act, which says that racially segregated facilities can be unequal in quality; and to the Group Areas Act, which continues to force residents of different racial groups into different territories. Similarly, the government has not shown any signs of dismantling the grossly inequitable homelands system or addressing the deepening crisis of black education, in which tens of thousands of African children are being denied education while white schools are closing because there are too few white students.

Despite the legitimate skepticism of those who watched de Klerk's predecessor, P. W. Botha, use cosmetic reforms to conceal his efforts to turn South Africa into a highly militarized national security state, there are important signs that South Africa is lurching toward a new dispensation. In some areas the transformation is already well under way. The repeated attempts by the South African government at the provincial and local level to install cooperative black leaders have generally failed. Most local citizens—following a call by the interlocking organizations of the United Democrat Front (UDF), the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM), and the ANC—boycotted the elections that installed city councils in the huge, sprawling townships that ring South Africa's cities. The UDF/MDM leaders have set up alternative community organizations elected and administered through an intricate system of street committees. In some cases, as in the colossal township of Soweto outside Johannesburg, the elected civil authorities have agreed to work closely with the community organizations, and thus formed a more or less united front against white authorities. In others, such as in the Crossroads camp outside Cape Town, continuing tension between the parallel political structures has led to repeated incidents of violence and retribution.

During the worst days of the states of emergency (the first in 1985 and the second from 1986 until now), the leaders of the UDF were detained for months and the structure was depleted. De Klerk has allowed a thaw, which in many townships has permitted UDF/MDM community organizations to consolidate their informal system into a de facto government. More significantly, important white political and economic organizations have been forced to recognize their legitimacy.

For example, the Soweto People's Delegation (SPD)—a community organization whose board includes Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South African Council of Churches President Frank Chikane, and Alberta Sisulu, wife of Walter Sisulu—has been negotiating directly with the management of ESCOM, the national electric utility that serves both Soweto and the white suburbs of Johannesburg. For more than two years the township has been putting pressure on the government and the utility by refusing to pay rents and electric bills—the cost to ESCOM alone has been more than seven million rand a month ($2.8 million), which the national government has quietly paid to keep the institution solvent. As part of the preliminary conditions for ending the boycotts, the SPD asked ESCOM to accept a unified electric network and user fee for all of greater Johannesburg, instead of the current artificial separation into white and black communities. The negotiators for ESCOM agreed, but the Johannesburg City Council so far has refused to accept this without a mandate from the white voters. On January 25 a similar meeting in Port Elizabeth on the eastern Cape included community organizations, ESCOM executives, and Nationalist Party members of Parliament. They concluded in principle that a unified electrical system made economic, technical, and political sense.

Such negotiations have demonstrated that South Africa's ruling institutions can resolve local conflicts only through direct negotiation with those recognized by the community. In some communities, such as Cape Town, there has even been a strange role reversal as eager white municipal authorities trying to break down the artificial boundaries created by apartheid have been spurned by community activists who have been committed for decades to non-collaboration until majority rule.

De Klerk's actions, whether voluntary or coerced, have raised expectations so high that discussions among government officials, union leaders, business executives, university faculty, ANC members, and local activists have shifted from whether there will be majority rule to what it will look like when it comes. Everyone agrees that the transition, even if peaceful, will not be easy. Since World War II South Africa's economy has been grossly distorted by the weird restrictions of apartheid, by excessive economic concentration, and by authoritarian government control. Trade and financial sanctions, though widely acknowledged as having had an important role in moving the white regime toward reform, have steadily whittled down the country's growth rate.

A new government, whether it comes in a year or in a decade, will have to make complex decisions about wealth distribution, nationalization, capital investment, and industrial and residential development. The external officials of the ANC, mindful of the events in Eastern Europe, have gone far out of their way to reassure

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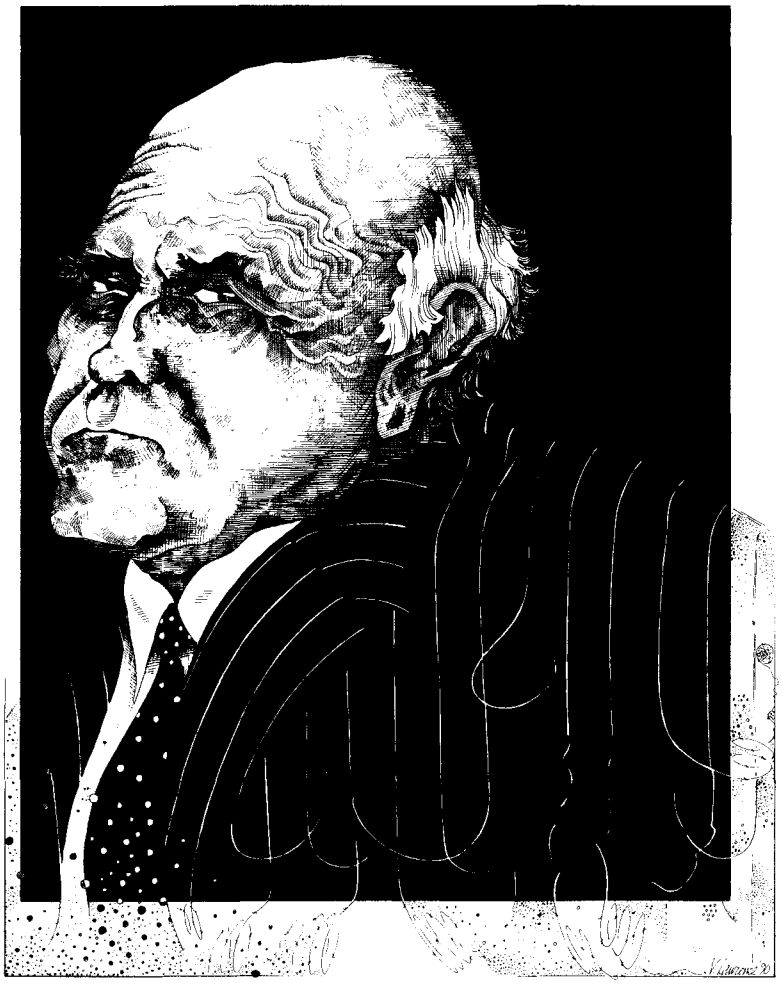
Western governments and companies that what they seek is not a centralized state but a mixed economy. But local activists in the unions and in the townships—who still refer to each other as "comrade"—are deeply suspicious that the collapse of communism they see on state-controlled television is another Nationalist Party trick to weaken their resolve. In Port Elizabeth, for example, a local union organizer insisted that the people of Eastern Europe had not rejected socialism or state ownership of the means of production but had merely purged themselves of corrupt leaders.

Economic issues are not the only important features being debated. At a January conference organized by IDASA at the University of Cape Town on the slope of Table Mountain, participants from across racial and political lines discussed the new structures that would be necessary for "democratic accountability" in a new South Africa. All recognized that after 42 years certain basic institutions that had been warped by the Nationalist Party's obsession with race would have to be straightened out or scrapped and rebuilt. In sessions stretching over three days, business, government, union, and ANC-affiliated participants debated the merits and dimensions of a democracy. After many years in which judges have been subordinate to the legislature, legal scholars pondered what it would be like to have a truly independent judiciary. After more than two decades since the abolition of juries, advocates pondered what it would mean to have a trial by one's peers in South Africa. Journalists eagerly discussed the merits of a truly unfettered press, which for many included the possibility of some sort of economically determined state subsidy to prevent the affluent white minority from overwhelming the editorial mission of papers through the exigencies of advertising. Political activists debated the idea of a South African bill of rights and differed over whether it should follow a more libertarian model, as in the United States, or include social rights such as employment, health, and housing, as is popular in European countries controlled by social democrats.



F. W. DE KLERK BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

The debate brought to light some serious disagreements. One prominent conservative journalist, Ken Owen of *Business Day*, stomped out of the room when a small committee proposed a resolution recommending that editors continue to test government restrictions by quoting banned individuals. White liberals peppered one representative of the United Democratic Front over his use of the term "collective leadership" until they were satisfied that he was not sneaking in Stalinism under the guise of democracy. Nonetheless, at the end of the conference a remarkable mood of consensus had developed that South Africans of all races would have an excellent chance of success in building a new polity.

This optimism could still easily be shattered. Mandela, whose stature has grown to mythic proportions while in prison, is not yet free. When released, he may not long have the power to draw the many different anti-apartheid movements together under the umbrella of the ANC. Though Mandela has sent conciliatory messages from prison to the leaders of the various homelands, he will have to negotiate a particularly tricky peace with Kwazulu Chief Minister Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi. This is made harder every month as more and more ANC and Buthelezi supporters kill each other in what approaches civil war in Natal. On the government side, the reactionary Conservative Party is still searching for ways to block de Klerk's efforts, and the neo-Nazi AWB (Afrikaner Resistance Movement) may develop into a vicious South African Ku Klux Klan. Indeed, de Klerk's authority and integrity are being tested by compelling allegations that over the past decade many activists were gunned down by a government-approved death squad. So far de Klerk has smothered any new revelations by refusing to appoint a commission of inquiry and leaving the police to investigate themselves. But the high probability that more right-wing violence will explode as de Klerk edges toward negotiations means that

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both de Klerk and the ANC will have to exercise tremendous discipline in order to see the process through.

De Klerk bristled publicly when told that U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman Cohen and the Democratic leadership in Congress have reached an agreement to delay the consideration of new economic sanctions until the end of South Africa's parliamentary session in June. The deadline, however, is real and is largely the result of de Klerk's own actions. On February 2 de Klerk told his country and the world that more significant reforms are forthcoming and that "the time for negotiation has arrived"; he should not grumble if millions of his own citizens from all races take him at his word. Those citizens are already designing and building a new country from the bottom up, and they are looking for his support. If Parliament closes without major new developments, the anticipation that has arisen in the cities and the townships could explode, triggering more repression, more violence, more international sanctions, and more misery. But if de Klerk can navigate into serious negotiations with a freed Nelson Mandela at the head of a unified ANC, then South Africa's long detour through the ugly depths of legalized racism may at last come to an end.

ROBERT K. MASSIE JR. teaches at Harvard Divinity School and is writing a book on the history of the South African divestment movement in the United States.

The answer: real capitalism.

HOW TO AID A.I.D.

By Morton Kondracke

The Senate Republican leader dropped a bomb on the foreign aid status quo in January by suggesting a five percent cut in funds for Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, and the Philippines in order to provide $330 million more in aid for Eastern Europe and Panama. But the bomb did not explode, nor is it likely to. Foreign aid needs drastic reform in order to stimulate economic growth in the Third World and truly benefit poor people. Bob Dole's approach—cutting Israel to help Hungary—had little to do with systemic reform. It did do this much, however: even though foreign aid is perennially unpopular in Congress, it stimulated Democratic leaders to declare almost in unison that the aid "pie" should be expanded, with new money coming from the defense budget, especially from funds now allocated to defend Western Europe.

Dole was trying to take a small step toward another, worthier goal that the Bush Administration also has been pushing: getting Congress to stop earmarking funds for a few favored countries, thereby forcing other needy nations to make do with little aid, or none at all. In this too he has almost certainly failed. A top official of the Agency for International Development (AID) said he was told by a Senator, "There are only two reasons to be on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. One is to get on television when there's a foreign crisis. The other is to provide goodies for your friends in the Third World."

Congress specifically directs where 92 percent of all U.S. military aid is to go, 98 percent of all Economic Support Funds (free grants for budget support), and 50 percent of all development funds. As a result, countries without lobbies or influential legislators to protect them are left with far less money than they need and deserve, often close to nothing. Examples this year include Jamaica, Honduras, Senegal, the Sudan, Chad, and Ecuador. The Administration thought about invoking special Presidential authority to shift funds in the interests of national security but feared Congress might take the authority away. So the fiscal 1991 budget shows no signs of changing the status quo.

Whatever good Dole intended to do was undermined by the perception that his ulterior motive was to target Israel, the biggest benefactor of U.S. aid. Israel gets $3 billion per year out of the $15 billion aid total (followed by Egypt, with $2.1 billion). The fact that the Administration generally supported Dole's idea led to suspicions (also stoutly denied) that Secretary of State James Baker was sending a message to Israel to be more forthcoming on the Mideast peace process. The Israel lobby is aroused and has the added force of a meritorious case: Israel needs money to absorb tens of thousands of Jewish émigrés from the Soviet Union that the United States no longer will take in. Meanwhile the Arab threat to its security has not been affected by the events in the East bloc, since Syria was substantially resupplied before the great change.

Pro-Israel lobbyists surely will help win extra money for Eastern Europe and Panama, but money alone will not solve the basic problems of American foreign aid. As recommended by one Administration and one Congressional task force last year, there needs to be a refocusing of the program toward a few specific goals, clarity at AID about accomplishing those goals, and less micro-management by Congress.

Making American aid more efficient actually would be the best way out of the money trap, better than robbing some countries to help others or simply increasing the aid budget, which hasn't enough popular or Congressional support to be a long-term option anyway. Unfortunately, the reform cause lost its most vigorous advocate last June when AID Director Alan Woods died of cancer at age 43. His post is only just being filled on a permanent basis with the nomination of Ronald Roskens, former president of the University of Nebraska,

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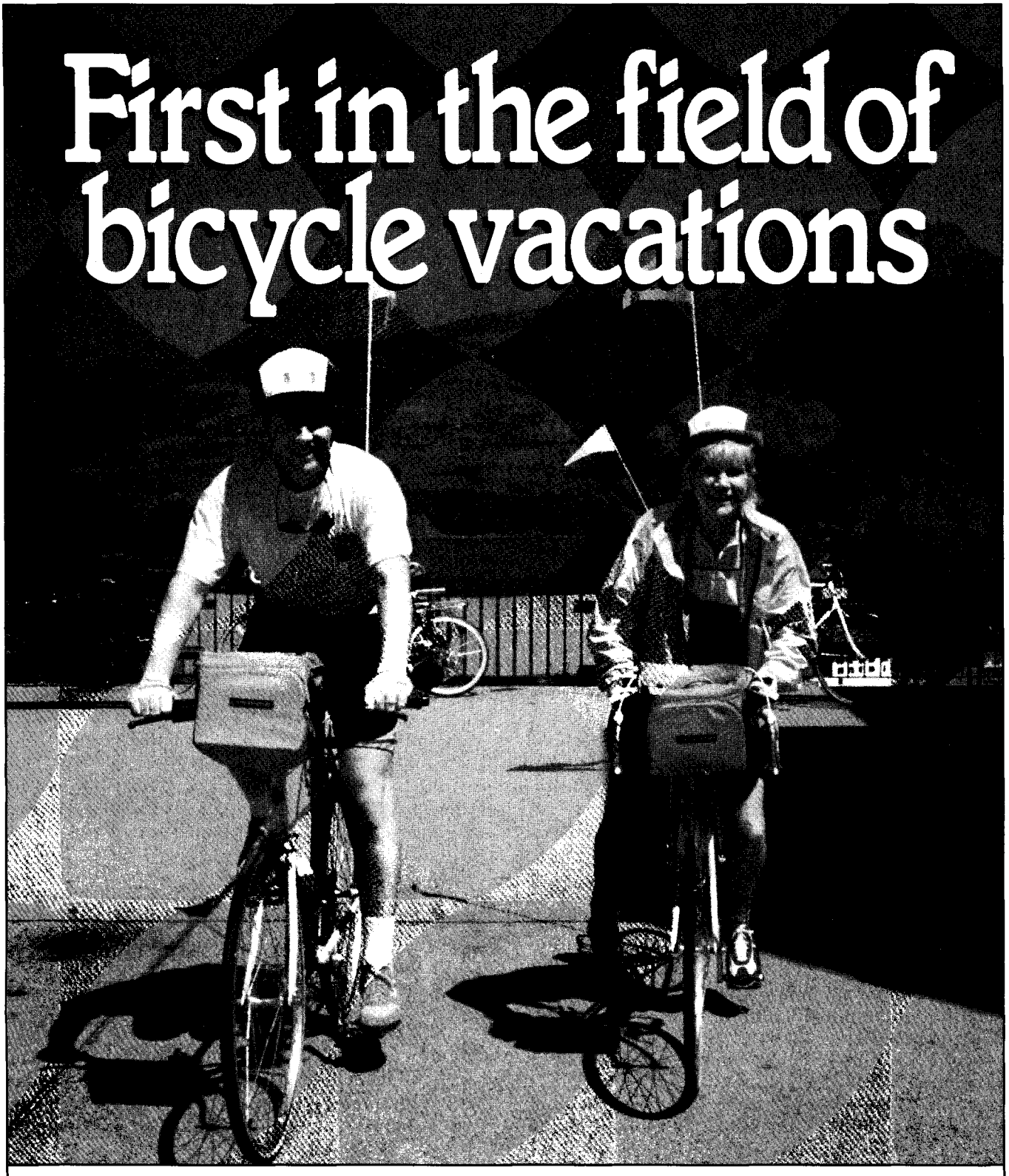

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whose basic views on aid are still not clear.

Woods left behind a comprehensive report detailing AID's failings, including the fact that not a single country eligible for U.S. aid has graduated into self-sufficiency in nearly 20 years and many have become poorer. In part, Woods said, Congress has mandated too many purposes for the agency. To name a few, it's legally required to advance America's strategic interests, win friends for the United States in the developing world, build democratic institutions, feed the hungry, counter initiatives of the Soviet Union, dispose of U.S. agricultural surpluses, promote private-sector growth in the Third World, improve education, achieve health for all by the year 2000, and strengthen both the American land grant college system and the historically black colleges and universities.

In their similar report last year, Representatives Lee Hamilton and Benjamin Gilman said that AID had been given 33 separate objectives and 75 "priorities" by Congress, which also has imposed 288 individual reporting requirements—second only to the number levied on the Defense Department, which has a budget of $300 billion compared with AID's development budget of $5 billion. Out in the developing world, AID field workers complain that they spend so much time filling out reports for Congress and Washington headquarters that they have only an afternoon a week to help the poor. The first priority of AID bureaucrats everywhere is always to spend this year's money so that next year's budget doesn't get cut.

Woods had a vision: to convert AID from a welfare agency easing the woes of the poor—"baby washing," some of his allies call it—to a promoter of economic growth. Woods was deeply influenced by the work of Hernando De Soto, a former Peruvian banker who advocates a combination of political democracy and economic empowerment of the so-called "informal sector" in Third World countries. He means the hardworking peddlers, tradesmen, and other small-scale, just-get-by private "businessmen" who often account for 60 percent to 70 percent of a country's real GNP but are not legally recognized by the government, have no access to credit or insurance, and are unable to incorporate and share the risk of doing business.

Many Americans think the economies of Latin America are "capitalist." De Soto says they are really "mercantilist." He said recently on the PBS show I moderate, "American Interests," that "what we've traditionally had in Latin America is the possibility of doing business for only a few. . . . It's crony capitalism that involves, on the part of the businessman, a lot of politicking, getting through heavy regulation, often bribes." According to De Soto, "Of 175 countries in the world, there are only 21 market economies and open democracies. What we've discovered is that in most of Latin America most people work outside the law. They are doing the same things we're doing, but on a smaller scale, inefficiently, with low productivity—selling, buying, producing, manufacturing, doing agriculture, building furniture, weaving carpets, making eyeglasses. They don't have the advantage of economies of scale, they do it with very little credit, or loan-shark credit."

De Soto's book, *The Other Path*, about Peru, is a hot seller among developmentalists all over the world. He's working on a sequel dealing with Eastern Europe and other underdeveloped countries, but his agenda is clear: the best way to fight poverty is to give peasants, squatters, and "informal" workers legal title to their land, which will give them collateral and the chance to expand. A concomitant, he says, is that "democracy" means not just having elections, but giving citizens and the legislative branch the opportunity to affect what the elected executive is doing and to deregulate the economy for entrepreneurship large and small.

Woods saw to it that De Soto's Institute for Liberty and Democracy got $2 million a year to do research and spread the word. He also managed to redirect AID priorities so that programs stimulating private-sector development doubled as a portion of AID's development budget, from ten percent to 22 percent of the total. Woods was convinced that more countries needed to follow the models of Taiwan, South Korea, and other East Asian nations where per capita income has soared because of private enterprise development.

Woods died, though, before he could convert the AID bureaucracy to the idea of making growth its top goal in the developing world, or get the Government to condition aid to Third World countries on their willingness to adopt pro-growth economic policies. Despite directives from on high, AID directors for African countries spent much of two annual conferences debating the morality of private enterprise. And cold war thinking has sometimes prevented the Administration from telling a strategic ally—say, Zaire—to cut corruption and excessive government regulation or do without U.S. assistance.

Hamilton and Gilman too recommended that economic growth promotion become one of AID's top priorities, along with just three others: environmental protection, poverty reduction, and promotion of economic and political pluralism. Hamilton called for a reduction of earmarking and of onerous reporting requirements to Congress.

Unfortunately, the Woods and Hamilton-Gilman reform ideas are almost as dead as Dole's suggestions. The Senate has not even considered reform. Meanwhile, a vigorous, well-meaning citizens' lobby, RESULTS International, flooded Congress with mail and editorials last year and got the House to pass the Global Poverty Reduction Act, which adds legal requirements for AID to reduce infant mortality, female illiteracy, and the general poverty level of Third World countries by 50 percent during the 1990s. Woods' allies at AID say poverty reduction deserves to be a main goal, but that to divert resources specifically to infant health and female literacy is to treat symptoms of poverty, not causes.

There ought to be a way for RESULTS and AID to

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cooperate and not to fight. RESULTS has what AID does not—a grass-roots following for foreign aid, including 100 chapters in the United States that hold three meetings a month, one by national telephone hookup. But the director of RESULTS, anti-hunger activist Sam Harris, aged 43, doesn't trust a Republican Administration or AID bureaucrats to truly serve the poor. AID reformers don't trust the bureaucracy either, contending it has a vested interest in the welfare model for foreign aid, not the economic growth idea. And Congress obviously doesn't trust the Administration and persists in micromandating what AID should do.

There is some hope. RESULTS and AID now are fighting over—but may come to terms on—a De Sotoesque idea: providing credit opportunities for tiny enterprises around the world, on the model of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which makes loans of as little as $50 to micro-entrepreneurs and regularly gets paid back. The Administration and Congress so far seem agreed on trying the Woods approach at least to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

No one suggests appropriating money for "foreign aid" or "bailouts" for the Soviet Union. What's been offered so far is technical assistance in 12 areas to teach the Soviets how to dismantle state monopolies, set up a budget and taxing system, form private agricultural cooperatives, train bankers, and start up small private businesses. The Administration's new budget calls for $300 million in new funds for Eastern Europe, with the main emphasis on institutional measures to expand private enterprise and trade.

If Congress and the Administration can agree that a shift from state socialism to free enterprise is the only way to prosperity for Eastern Europe, and they have the examples of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea to show that a shift from mercantilism to real capitalism will produce prosperity, why can't they apply these principles to the rest of the developing world and make them the basis for a reformed foreign aid program? They can, but so far they won't. •

Modrow knows the end is near.

THE TURNING POINT

By Robert Darnton

BERLIN

The revolution in East Germany has had so many turning points it makes the head spin, but the turn taken at the end of January seems to be decisive. Prime Minister Hans Modrow advanced the date of the parliamentary elections to March 18 and announced that until then the government would be run by a coalition of all the major political parties. The Communist (SED) Party has renounced its monopoly on power in fact as well as in principle, and it did so with the blessing of Mikhail Gorbachev, who not only endorsed Modrow's moves during a hurried meeting in Moscow but also gave qualified support to the prospect of German reunification.

To many outside the GDR, this turn of events will appear healthy; Modrow made it sound catastrophic. When he described the state of affairs to the East German parliament on January 29, he seemed to be announcing the end of the world. He confessed that his government could find no way to stop the immigration to West Germany, which threatens to cripple key sectors of the economy. Strikes were breaking out everywhere, workers were demanding impossible pay increases, the state's budget was teetering toward bankruptcy, production was falling, crime increasing, and local administration grinding to a halt. "Radicalization" had gone so far that all sorts of public institutions were receiving bomb threats. Fear was seizing the entire apparatus of the state, and he could not guarantee the safety of ordinary citizens. In short, the GDR stood on the brink of chaos, and it could be saved only by the formation of a "government of national responsibility."

Modrow is not given to apocalyptic pronouncements. He has a slow, deliberate way of speaking that makes the ponderous manner of Helmut Kohl seem light. In fact, some say that Modrow has adopted Kohl's style, although the two men look so different—Kohl could eat Modrow for breakfast—that the comparison seems ludicrous. Modrow often begins statements with long, Kohl-like windups such as "I take it as a presupposition that . . ." And his rhetoric sounds so unrhetorical that it rings true. "Here is a man of substance," those on the receiving end are supposed to say to themselves, "not a politician."

But Modrow is a politician, the only one in the GDR

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who enjoys both respect and visibility among the population as a whole. In only a few weeks as prime minister, he has made himself into East Germany's elder statesman. Before the November revolution, he was relegated by the old apparatchiks to a provincial post in Dresden. While they grew fat in their hunting lodges, he lived in a modest apartment and joined the demonstrations. Then, in desperation, the Party called on him to head the government, where he has ruled as the embodiment of virtue and solidity, the ultimate *Spiessbürger* (petit bourgeois) in the "land of workers and peasants."

The look and manner of Modrow is of more than anecdotal importance, because the whole country is awash with symbolic transformation. In fact, most of the violence mentioned by Modrow has taken place on the symbolic level. The workers and peasants may be packing their bags for resettlement in West Germany, but they are not lobbing Molotov cocktails into town halls. There are, though, ferociously anti-Communist graffiti everywhere. Karl-Marx-Stadt announced that it would resume its old name, Chemnitz. The Communist Party itself is debating another name change, in the hope of expunging its Stalinist past. Having traded in its old title, the SED (Socialist Unity Party), for a double-barreled name, SED-PDS (Socialist Unity Party-Party of Democratic Socialism), it now proposes to call itself simply the PDS. It also removed its emblem, a 15-foot, multi-ton monstrosity, from the facade of its headquarters in East Berlin. The operation took three days and left an open wound on what once appeared to be an impregnable bastion. Photographers made the most of it, especially as the insignia had been a pet project of Erich Honecker, the former Party chief.

Honecker himself has become little more than a symbol. After three cancer operations, at age 77 he looks like a dead man. He tottered out of the hospital, visibly disoriented, on the day that Modrow announced the new coalition government, and he was promptly put under arrest. In the flurry of medical bulletins and the flash of photographers' light bulbs, one had the impression that the surgeons were keeping him alive so that he could stand trial for corruption. Honecker has come to personify the evils of the old Party just as Modrow embodies the virtues of the new one, and the SED (or SED-PDS or PDS) needs to bury its past by condemning its former leader and his closest associates. As Hans-Jurgen Joseph, the prosecutor-general, explained to parliament, "We have a historical duty to bring to justice the main culprits for violations of the constitution, for our economic chaos, for the muzzling of the people and systematic violation of human rights." Translation: the Party needs a scapegoat.

It could hardly do better than Honecker, who occupies a peculiar place in the East German imagination. Having tyrannized the country for years, he is now hated with an intensity that can barely be imagined in the West. Turned out of his house in the luxurious colony for Party leaders in the Wandlitz section of Berlin, he has taken refuge in the rectory of a Lutheran minister in Lobetal, north of Berlin, while he awaits his trial. A Church spokesman said that it had received 22 threatening phone calls in one morning from people who were furious that it had given asylum to "a pig."

That is the sort of violence that Modrow deplored in his speech of January 29. He warned parliament against "growing social tensions, which the existing political structures are increasingly unable to control." But the problem resides more in the political structures themselves than in the social order. Modrow is so much a politician, however incorruptible, that he may mistake the collapse of his own party for the disintegration of society. To a man who has devoted his life to the Party in a society where the Party has monopolized all forms of politics, the end of the Party must look like the end of the world.

But the end is near, at least for what remains of the old SED. The Party's name changes are a symptom of a deep discontent within its lower ranks. When one talks with its members in private, they say that time and time again they have failed to reform it from within and are now determined to dissolve it altogether in order to create a social democratic party like those in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia—or, more to the point, West Germany.

However, West Germany's Social Democrats (the SPD) have spawned a brother party in the GDR, which is also called the SPD, and it is emerging as the most powerful new party in the entire country. In fact, so many new parties have sprung up in the GDR that one could say the East Germans are re-creating politics. Instead of a system of conflicting factions within a single Leviathan party, they have produced a whole spectrum of political organizations. At least two dozen parties are fielding candidates for the March 18 election; and if one counts splinter groups, the number of players in the new political game would come to well over 50. Indeed, the East Germans are not just playing a new round of an old game, they are inventing the game itself, with a new set of rules: that is the chaos that horrifies Modrow. The East Germans have not had any experience with a free, multiparty system since Hitler seized power in 1933. Will they be able to improvise one in time to establish an effective government by March 18?

But the new politics of the GDR are actually conditioned by two factors other than the SED situation: relations with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to the West and with the Soviet Union to the East. Consider the situation in the last week of January, when the critical turn was made. At the beginning of the week, Modrow declared that the government's authority had eroded so seriously that he needed to form an emergency coalition ministry with nine major opposition parties. The parties had been advancing ever greater demands for a share in the government's decisions since they began negotiating with it at the Round Table in early December. Now they began to negotiate among themselves about whether they could afford to say no. At the

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same time the four bloc parties that had ruled for years in collaboration with the SED began to consider whether they should leave the current ministry. Every party inside and outside the government had to weigh two basic considerations: on the one hand, the attraction of assuming power and responsibility in a moment of crisis; on the other, the danger of contamination from the Communists.

The balance tipped at a different angle in different cases, depending on the particular strengths and weaknesses of each group. The bloc parties had worked hand in glove with the SED for so long that they seemed likely to be wiped out in an anti-Communist backlash at the elections. One of them, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), announced on January 24 that it would withdraw from the government—and then withdrew its withdrawal two days later. On the same day, January 26, the opposition groups said they would accept a coalition but only under stringent conditions: Modrow and the other ministers would have to cut their alignment with the SED and turn over all the key posts to the opposition.

By January 28 Modrow had extracted a promise from the other bloc parties to remain with the SED and the CDU in his government, and he began a seven-hour marathon negotiation with the opposition parties. At midnight they reached the crucial decision to advance the election from May 6 to March 18 and to govern the country together as a coalition until that date.

Then everyone fell to squabbling. The SDP's partners at the Round Table accused it of precipitating an early election in order to take advantage of its relatively advanced stage of organization. And the CDU lamented that its ties to the SED were depriving it of support from the Christian Democrats in West Germany. At this point the parties' Western connections began to become crucial, owing to three main factors.

First, reunification with the FRG had emerged as the overwhelming desire of the electorate, except for a few fringe groups on the far left. Second, each of the new parties needed money and equipment, which could be legally supplied from affiliates in the West, according to a revised draft of the new electoral law. And third, the configuration of power in the FRG itself shifted after Oskar Lafontaine won a striking victory for the SPD in the state elections in the Saar on January 28. Lafontaine is certain to lead the SPD in the general elections in West Germany in December, and he now looks like a strong threat to Hermut Kohl and the CDU. So there are really two campaigns under way, each influencing the other.

Whether voters can follow it all, or care to, is another question. They may well get lost in the forest of symbols and the underbrush of party initials. The CDU in the FRG does not get along with the CDU in the GDR, which is thinking of changing its name to the DU (German Union) or the DSU (Democratic Social Union), while the Western FDP (Free Democratic Party) hesitates to align itself with either of its analogues in the East, the FDPD (Free Democratic Party of Germany) and the FDP (Free Democratic Party)—and the Communists continue to call themselves SED, SED-PDS, and PDS. It is enough to drive one to distraction.

Instead of going down that road, the East Germans continue to climb into their Trabis and drive West, voting with their wheels. The statistical count varies, but it came to about 400,000 last year; and unless the political and economic situation improves, it may well reach a million in 1990—a vital six percent of the population, since the emigrants are mainly young and skilled. Unification is becoming a fait accompli, by the interpenetration of the political parties and the emigration of the East German population.

Unification remains a crucial question of principle, nonetheless, because the relations of East and West Germany are embedded in the relations of the Eastern and Western powers. Therefore, as soon as he had announced the formation of his emergency coalition, Modrow flew off to Moscow. Here, too, his *Spiessbürger* bearing may have done him service. He arrived on Gorbachev's doorstep looking earnest and exhausted and clutching his briefcase like a messenger boy. Nothing could have been further from the Soviet caricature of the West German as a fascist-revanchist man-eating monster. Gorbachev then made the pronouncement: German unification was not in itself objectionable. It was a question that "history would decide." Gorbachev had made a similar remark to Richard Weizsäcker, the president of West Germany, three years ago, giving history "a hundred years" to make up its mind. Now he declared that it was about to make its decision, which meant in effect that his own mind was made up.

Gorbachev's benediction may save the East German Communists from a disaster in the election, because they were the only important party that had not rallied to the cause of unification, which is the most popular cause in all the other platforms. On February 1, therefore, Modrow was able to announce his own plan for a "united German fatherland" ("*Deutschland einig Vaterland*"—a phrase stolen from the opposition demonstrations). In some points it coincided with the ten-step plan proposed by Chancellor Kohl last December, but in one respect it had a curious resemblance to a proposal made by Stalin in 1952: a united Germany, with its present boundaries, would remain neutral and demilitarized in the midst of Europe.

The same proposal 38 years later had a completely different meaning, for the context had changed, and meaning in politics, as in poetry, depends on context as much as content. No one, Modrow included, expects West Germany to withdraw from NATO. But everyone understood that Modrow, Gorbachev, and Communists everywhere had now accepted the inevitability of German reunification.

Will that be enough to rescue the Communists on March 18? No one can say, because history is moving faster every day, and it has plenty of time to change its mind in the next few weeks. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Odd Couples

Martin Ritt is not only the most politically concerned of Hollywood directors, he's the one most interested in the working class. (The term still applies, though we often like to kid ourselves, because of omnipresent TV sets and shiny new cars, not necessarily paid for, that the middle class has rolled downward to engulf the proletariat.) Now, in **Stanley and Iris** (MGM), Ritt is back with the workers. *The Molly Maguires* was set in the Pennsylvania coal fields, *Norma Rae* in a Southern mill town. This time Ritt takes us to a New England industrial town.

Stanley and Iris are both in early middle age. She, played by Jane Fonda, is a widow, with a teenage daughter and a small son. She works in a huge bakery—really a factory for the production of pies, cakes, and muffins. He, Robert De Niro, works in the bakery cafeteria. He is single, clearly interested in Iris, but somewhat reserved. His reserve is explained when Iris discovers that he is illiterate (a condition he shares, says the Department of Education, with one-fifth of all adult Americans). And that's when we learn why Ritt made this picture. Up to then it's a bit of a puzzle. Now we see the social problem that attracted him.

Iris's discovery inadvertently costs Stanley his job, but their friendship continues, though bumpily, as he finds other menial jobs. Eventually Iris offers to teach him to read; eventually he accepts. His learning and their romance progress. We know that it's too soon for the film to end, that some trouble must happen along to sunder them and allow them to rejoin in time. All this comes about.

The making of the film is comfortable, assured. Ritt can't be said to have developed an individual style, but he has some characteristics. He likes the two-room shot, which puts viewers at the point of a V so that we can see things happening along two visual arms divided by a wall. He likes to let people flow around the principals in a scene. In the bakery yard and in the street, Stanley and Iris sometimes seem to be conversing on the bank of a stream of people.

Unsurprisingly, Ritt does his best work with his actors. (He once taught at the Actors' Studio in New York.) Both Fonda and De Niro give performances that are more flexed and shaded than in their recent films, as if Ritt had helped them find their way back to their talents. Almost everything that the picture accomplishes comes from the acting of the stars.

But that's not enough, because the screenplay is flabby. Adapted from a novel by Pat Barker, it was written by Harriet Frank Jr. and Irving Ravetch, who have done a lot of work with Ritt, some of it memorable (*Hud, Conrack, Norma Rae*). The film takes too long to get to its reason for being, Stanley's illiteracy; before that, and after, it's laden with family decor that is supposed to provide texture but seems like mere padding. There's a quarrel between Iris's sister and her husband, both of whom are staying with her because they are out of work—a strand that's never tied up. Iris's daughter gets pregnant. (She is played by Martha Plimpton, who has done so many rebellious teenagers that I'd have thought Ritt would have wanted someone else.) The pregnancy is quite irrelevant to the story.

Stanley's father is an eccentric European gentleman, so distingué that the son's explanation of his illiteracy is incredible. No matter how much they traveled around when Stanley was a boy—so that his schooling was difficult—this father would never have allowed his son to remain illiterate. We get the pro forma Getting-To-Know-You scene between Stanley and Iris's young son. Stanley is made a secret mechanical genius (though it's not clear how an illiterate could have ordered parts or made calculations for the machine he invents), a touch that turns this supposedly honest exploration into gauze.

And Iris, who is she? This highly articulate, poised woman seems out of place among her fellow bakery workers. Is she slumming? Has widowhood forced a former schoolteacher into a prole job? We are not told. Neither was Fonda. What she was given to do, she does well, but the character seems placeless and baseless.

All these muddles cluster around the main defect in the film—the lack of drive in the central story. Instead of a drama about unacknowledged class structure in America today, the film is just a mild middle-aged love story with the gimmick

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Cinema Paradiso. *A film theater in a Sicilian town and the magic it works on a small boy and his future. Warm feelings, à la Fellini, about community and romance. (Reviewed 2/19/90)* **Enemies, A Love Story.** *A superb cast, well directed by Paul Mazursky (who also is in it), makes this screen version of I. B. Singer's novel a treat. Amorous intrigues of four Nazi survivors in New York interweave past horror with present farce-drama. (1/1/90)* **Flashback.** *A straight-laced young FBI agent escorts a '60s radical leader back to jail. Do they ever arrive? See this well-made, credible-enough comedy for the answer(s)—and for some jabs at present-day stolidity. (2/19/90)* **Glory.** *Outstanding direction by Edward Zwick, splendid performances (except from Matthew Broderick) make this epic about a black regiment in the Civil War monumentally large and stirring. The implications (about the present) are bitter, the execution fine. (1/8&15/90).* **—SK**

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of illiteracy. Fonda and De Niro do what they can, but they can't do it all.

Jane Campion is a newcomer, a New Zealander who works in Australia and is now loudly hailed in America. **Sweetie** (Avenue) is her first feature. She wrote it with Gerard Lee; but after the first five or six minutes, it's clear that her heart is not in the screenplay, it's in the pictures that she makes with her cinematographer Sally Bongers.

Still, there *is* a screenplay—about a young Australian factory worker named Kay, who believes in omens and hauntings. Tea leaves, for instance. A medium tells her that a question mark will figure in her life. She then meets Lou, a young man whose hair curls in a question mark on his forehead. Immediately she seduces him away from his fiancée. Then Sweetie arrives at the house that Kay shares with Lou. Sweetie is Kay's adipose, highly disturbed sister who thinks she's a pop singer and who brings along her drugged-out "producer." Sweetie immediately slovens up the house, in her neurotic way, and the parents can't help, because back in *their* house, Mom has just left Dad and has gone out west to become a cook on a ranch (as we'd call it).

A few questions. What did Lou's fiancée say or do to Kay after the latter stole her boyfriend? Why did Kay and Lou make love in an oil puddle on a garage floor? Why did Mom leave Dad? Why do Mom and Dad become reconciled? What do Kay and Lou and Dad think will happen, other than disaster, when they leave Sweetie alone in Kay's house and drive out west to see Mom?

Answers are not expected. The questions themselves are the answer—the fact that they, and others, exist. They only underscore that Campion is more keen about photo opportunities than about dramatic or narrative cogency. Her screenplay is to her what a libretto was to a lesser 19th-century opera composer: a series of pegs for visual arias.

Corners of rooms, low angles, high angles, shots past large objects in the foreground, heightened light or lowered light—all these get a good workout. When we go to a cemetery, the first shot is of a row of cypress trees, through which we manage to glimpse one grave. This shot, like so many others, is not meant to epitomize the moment but to draw our attention to Campion. And Bongers.

Campion has been compared to Jim Jarmusch. This seems absurd. Jarmusch's spare screenplays are carefully measured to the necessary minimum, like good minimal design of every kind. His camera operates in the same precise, equivalently minimal way. Campion wants to deal much more conventionally with her characters, with more psychological probing and emotional interaction than Jarmusch cares about. At the same time she wants to indulge her painterly eye. The result is a deadlock between these two elements, dramatic and pictorial.

If Campion can accept that we now know about her eye and can concentrate on an integrated story, she might make a good traditional filmmaker. If that road doesn't interest her, she could diminish the emotional turbulence in her scripts so that it doesn't clamor for attention, and become something like a (minor) cinematic Robert Wilson. But whatever she does later, *Sweetie* is only a workshop along the way. •

Life catches up with *The New Yorker*.

A Friend Writes

BY LOUIS MENAND

I.

No one who has ever written about *The New Yorker* has failed to give offense. Sometimes, of course, offense was intended. When you have a reputation for being easily scandalized, people will be glad to find ways of helping you live up to it. In 1965 Tom Wolfe wrote an article about *The New Yorker* for the *New York Herald Tribune*'s Sunday magazine. On the eve of its publication, William Shawn, having failed after repeated phone calls to dissuade the paper's editor from running the piece, sent a pleading letter to the publisher, John Hay Whitney: "I know exactly what Wolfe's article is—a vicious, murderous attack on me and the magazine I work for. . . . In one stroke it puts the *Herald Tribune* right down in the gutter with the Graphic, the Enquirer, and *Confidential*. For your sake and for mine, and, in the long run, even for the sake of Wolfe and his editor, Clay Felker (God help me for caring about them), I urge you to stop the distribution of that article."

The Complete Book of Covers from "The New Yorker": 1925-1989
with a foreword by John Updike
(Knopf, 391 pp., $75)

Who could resist that kind of encouragement? The *Herald Tribune* ran the piece. It may not have done much for Jock Whitney; but the *Herald Tribune*'s Sunday magazine soon became *New York* magazine, Clay Felker became its editor, what became of Tom Wolfe everyone knows, and in 1966, the year after the offending article appeared, *The New Yorker* sold 6,143 pages of advertising, the highest number in its history. A little scandal is good for business.

Wolfe had every hope of doing harm; but even people who think they are doing the magazine a favor have had occasion to wish they hadn't bothered. No book has done more to promote the image of *The New Yorker* as the club every writer longs to join than James Thurber's *The Years with Ross* (1959). After it appeared, Thurber complained to Edmund Wilson that not a single person at *The New Yorker* offered a word of praise. Kenneth Tynan scolded Thurber for giving an insufficiently respectful picture of Harold Ross, the magazine's founding editor—who had died in 1951, seven years before Tynan joined the staff. Thurber's oldest and closest friend at the magazine, E. B. White, stopped speaking to him.

Brendan Gill's *Here at "The New Yorker"* (1975) tried the device of casting its author as a playful Eustace Tilley, examining his colleagues as though they were so many delightfully idiosyncratic butterflies. It was not, perhaps, a tactic calculated to please the butterflies; but Gill was only trying to do to *New Yorker* writers what *New Yorker* writers had done thousands of times to the subjects of "Talk of the Town" pieces and "Profiles." Few appreciated finding themselves on the other side of the monocle. It took E. J. Kahn, represented in the book by a single ancient and harmless anecdote, ten years before he could bring himself to speak again to Gill. Gill's paragraphs on Katharine White, the magazine's longtime fiction editor, describe her as a handsome and self-confident woman who deserves the credit for transforming *The New Yorker* into a serious literary magazine, and whose gracious but formidable editorial presence was considerably strengthened by her marriage to the indispensable E. B. White—which is pretty much the description found in every other account of Katharine White. When the book came

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out she considered suing Gill for libel. Talked out of that by her lawyer and her family, she contented herself with compiling a long list of all the inaccuracies in *Here at "The New Yorker"*; but the book, she confided to a friend, had come "near to killing me."

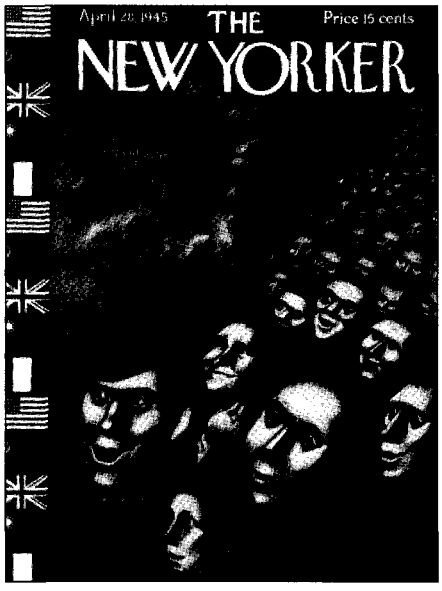
It is fair to say that most of these reactions flow not from personal pride, but from pride in the magazine. Writers and editors don't like seeing their idiosyncrasies in print any more than anyone else does, and it obviously does no good to point out to them that putting other people's idiosyncrasies into print is how most writers and editors make their livings. The wasp does not excuse the exterminator because they're both in the same business. But besides the perfectly natural distaste for reading about themselves and their friends as characters in someone else's amusing story, people who work at *The New Yorker* have a much stronger distaste for anything that suggests an incomplete respect for the dignity and the integrity of the magazine.

This is a peculiarity in journalism. For most journalists not at the top of a masthead, loyalty to the craft ranks higher than loyalty to the publication. Even people who work at the *New York Times*, a publication whose opinion of itself is very exalted indeed, don't (with obvious exceptions) mind seeing it ridiculed a little; no one, in fact, can ridicule the *Times* with keener scorn than a *Times*person off hours. But at *The New Yorker*, loyalty to the craft has always been identical with loyalty to the magazine. *The New Yorker* is identified with journalism in its most unadulterated state: the arts of writing and editing are practiced with every regard for the perfection of style, clarity, and accuracy, and with none for the two great ulterior motives of American journalism—selling copies and selling ads.

The firm and enforced separation between the editorial and the business sides of *The New Yorker* forms the centerpiece of every description of the magazine, and of every account of its success. "Don't shoot! Editorial!" the writer John McNulty used to shout as he emerged from the elevator on the editorial floor of the magazine's offices on West 43rd Street. For writers and editors were discouraged from fraternizing with people who worked on the business side—first by Ross, who feuded for years with the magazine's principal financial backer, Raoul Fleischmann, and then by Shawn, who succeeded Ross as editor in 1952. And business employees were not welcomed on the editorial floors.

No doubt (as McNulty's joke suggests) there was something a little silly about the decorums that some *New Yorker* editors and writers felt they had to observe in order to protect the product from contamination. But the principle behind the decorums is not silly; and to write for a commercial publication that has a long and public record of commitment to editorial integrity—and to get paid quite decently for doing so—is indeed to belong to a club any writer might envy.

This explains, of course, the panic that many *New Yorker* writers and editors felt when the magazine was purchased by S. I. Newhouse in 1985, and that some of them expressed so hysterically when Newhouse replaced Shawn with Robert Gottlieb two years later. For two generations the Fleischmann family had run *The*



APRIL 28, 1945
BY CHRISTINA MALMAN

New Yorker almost wholly benignly. (They were not, strictly speaking, the magazine's owners, for *The New Yorker* was a publicly traded company.) The reason for the benignity—as Gigi Mahon's interesting business history of the magazine, *The Last Days of "The New Yorker,"* makes clear—had less to do with an enlightened respect for art and literature than with a lackadaisical attitude toward business affairs that drove some of the other major stockholders on the magazine's board of directors to distraction.

Newhouse's attitude toward business affairs is not lackadaisical, and the Condé Nast magazines, which are the chief magazine properties in his publishing empire, are unashamedly great, fat books of advertising: *Vogue*, *HG*, *Vanity Fair*, *GQ*, *Mademoiselle*, *Traveler*, and the rest. When ad revenues threaten to fall off at those magazines, editorial content is shaken up—and so, frequently, are mastheads. It must have sent a long, apprehensive shiver through *New Yorker* writers when they saw Ralph Lauren featured on the cover of *Vanity Fair*, a magazine once touted as Condé Nast's answer to *The New Yorker*.

The New Yorker has not been joined to the Condé Nast group, though; it is being run, as they say, as a "stand-alone" entity. It was rumored to be losing money after Newhouse acquired it (Newhouse's Advance Publications is a private company, and the figures are not published); but the most recent reports suggest that the magazine has started to turn a profit again. Nor has there been any sign that editorial content is being shaped with a view to improving commerce. Some people criticize the magazine for that, but they are probably the same people who would criticize the magazine if it looked as though content *were* being shaped with an eye to commerce. There are some new bylines; there has been some unaggressive editorial tinkering; there are a few minor design changes. (It cannot be pleasant to be an editor who has only to make a tiny adjustment in the layout of the table of contents to wake up the next morning and find a story about it in the *New York Times*.) But things at *The New Yorker* seem, from the outside at any rate, to be running pretty much as they always have.

With, of course, one intangible difference: the mystique has evaporated. This can only be liberating to the people who work there now; but if you look back over the magazine's 65-year history, as the appearance of this enormous and expensive picture book of *New Yorker* covers invites you to do, you have to wonder about two things. The first is whether the magazine will ever again be the magnificent cash cow it was; and the second is whether the place in American culture that *The New Yorker* once occupied still exists.

II.

These two questions are actually the same question. For *The New Yorker*, too, was once a great, fat book of advertising, and the notion that the magazine's editorial matter had nothing to do with the spectacular forest of ads that grew up all around it over the years is, of course, pure myth.

The New Yorker was invented by Harold Ross, who had a concept so precocious that it took the rest of the industry 40 years to catch up to it. The concept was targeting. Why should, say, Bonwit Teller or Tiffany's spend money to advertise in magazines edited to reach the greatest possible number of readers, the majority of whom would never visit New York City, and, even if they did, couldn't afford the things that Bonwit's and Tiffany's were selling? Ross proposed a vehi-

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cle custom-designed for those advertisers: a magazine aimed specifically at people who did shop in New York City, and who could pay what Tiffany's was charging. When Ross wrote the most famous line in the prospectus for his new magazine—"*The New Yorker* will be the magazine which is not edited for the old lady in Dubuque"—he wasn't talking to his readers (for surely the old ladies of Dubuque appreciate clarity and accuracy and have a horror of prurience—values as central to Ross's editorial policy as they would later be to Shawn's). He was talking to his advertisers.

Ross pestered potential backers for years with this harebrained notion of a magazine designed to squeeze a bigger profit out of a smaller circulation. In 1924 Raoul Fleischmann, a poker companion bored by his job running the family bakery, took the bait—whether because he grasped the genius of Ross's scheme or because he simply found the idea of owning a magazine charming is hard to know. The first issue appeared in February 1925.

The New Yorker started as a hectic book of gossip, cartoons, and facetiae. It wooed "upscale" readers with courtship techniques that magazines of the 1980s have made familiar. It pelted them with celebrities—with vignettes about actors, actresses, club owners, the idle rich, even the editors of more successful magazines. And it boasted repeatedly of its refusal to take anything seriously, a form of self-promotion in journalism that generally means nothing more scandalous than being irreverent about other people's self-promotions. John Held Jr., an old friend of Ross's, did not actually draw a *New Yorker* cover, though he contributed some art for the inside; but there were many Heldlike covers in the early years: loud, flat stylizations of city nightlife. (Some were by Rea Irvin, the artist who created both the monocled dandy who appears on the anniversary cover and *The New Yorker*'s signature typeface.)

The idea, apparently, was that urbane chat about New York high life was the way to reach the well-to-do, that it flattered their sense of themselves as chic insiders. It didn't work. By summertime, circulation, which had started at 15,000, had dropped below 4,000. Ads were down to three or four pages an issue. Fleischmann threw in the towel, but was persuaded to change his mind and throw in more money instead.

Then the weather turned. In the summer and fall of 1925, Katharine White (then Katharine Angell), Janet Flanner, the artists Peter Arno and Helen Hokinson, and the fashion writer Lois Long all came on. Issues began selling out. By Christmas advertising contracts had been signed with B. Altman and Saks. In 1926 E. B. White, a disenchanted adman, was hired. In 1927 White brought in James Thurber, a disenchanted newspaper man, and Fleischmann rejected the first in what would turn out to be a very long series of offers to buy the magazine—this one for $3 million. By 1928 profits exceeded a quarter million dollars on revenues of $1.8 million. An issue of *The New Yorker* from the late '20s looks very much like the magazine today: a glossy, tidily designed book, combining mild, literate wit with reporting and reviewing, all surrounded by column after column and page after page of luxury advertising.

AUGUST 10, 1968
BY MISCHA RICHTER

Along the way, the urbanity was abandoned. In place of the insider chatter there rose up an entirely different kind of talk. It was bemused, but not smug; intelligent, but never smart; the talk of someone who knows where the party is and how to join it, but who is more disposed to stand, martini in hand, a step or two outside the circle of revelry, someone for whom the experience of ordinary life is the source of fully enough terror and ecstasy. In short, *The New Yorker* style was created.

III.

People at *The New Yorker* tend to dismiss the suggestion that there is such a thing as a *New Yorker* style. The requirement for a story, they say, is that it be well written; the requirement for a drawing is that it be funny. No test for house sensibility is applied. This is undoubtedly true, but it doesn't mean that there is no *New Yorker* style. For *The New Yorker* has always been a thoroughly—a famously thoroughly—edited magazine, and for 62 years under Ross and Shawn, its editorial principles were consistent. Whatever was knowing, allusive, or elliptical was amplified and clarified in the direction of perfect accessibility; whatever was suggestive, sensational, or offensive was carefully pruned of those excrescences.

This seems—as it was meant to seem—like an entirely negative editorial policy. Nothing, after all, gets added to the product. There is nothing that *must* be said; the ambition is merely to cure writing of the impurities that prevent it from saying whatever it is it wants to be saying. No decent editor would reject this as a basic principle of good editing. What is distinctive about *The New Yorker* is that this basic principle became, by virtue of the single-mindedness of the magazine's commitment to it, the overriding principle as well. It took on content. How *The New Yorker* was edited came to be what *The New Yorker* was all about.

Every reader of the magazine is familiar with the many ways in which this editorial policy made itself known. There is, to begin with, *The New Yorker*'s punctilio about correct punctuation and usage. The compulsion derives from Ross himself, who, while serving on the editorial staff of *Stars and Stripes* during the First World War, was once placed under house arrest for arguing too vehemently with a superior officer over the proper placement of a comma.

The interesting thing about correct usage is that it manages to be democratic and elitist at the same time. Famous writers can't get away with eccentricities just because they're famous. The rules apply to everybody. On the other hand, knowing what's correct is one of the signs of a superior education. The newsbreaks—the examples of other people's solecisms that fill out the columns at the end of stories—highlight the purity of the *New Yorker*'s text; and they are the magazine's tribute to the grammatical standards of its readers. A person may be excused for being unable to fix a toaster or to drive an automobile, they quietly suggest, but never for writing a sentence with a dangling participle. ("We'd use a pen.")

Then there is *The New Yorker*'s longstanding resistance to vulgarity. In the first theater review he submitted to the magazine, Tynan used the term "*pissoir*," a word Shawn could not bring himself to put into print. After a long and amiable discussion, it was agreed that "*pissoir*" would be changed to read "a circular curbside construction." For most of the magazine's history this habit of mind was

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probably less inhibiting than it has been made out to be. There is plenty of frankness in the magazine's art and in its writing, and if prudish circumspection was exercised at the editor's desk, it rarely shows up on the page.

But it is also true that the kind of work *The New Yorker* could attract was limited by the magazine's distaste for subject matter and vocabulary that were utterly commonplace in virtually every other literary forum. Katharine White once wrote to Norman Mailer asking if he would care to contribute a story to the magazine. He would not, Mailer replied, because he did not have the freedom to say "shit" in *The New Yorker*. White wrote back to suggest that perhaps Mr. Mailer did not understand the true meaning of freedom. Mailer answered that he did indeed understand the true meaning of freedom: freedom meant being able to say "shit" in *The New Yorker*.

Well, "The Time of Her Time" is a story probably no one at *The New Yorker* was sorry to have missed the chance to publish. It's hardly a *New Yorker* story. On the other hand, one of the great deficiencies in the magazine's reporting was its coverage of the events of the 1960s, and Mailer's early political journalism, which did a lot to make *Harper's* and *Esquire* exciting magazines in those days, was just the kind of perfectly serious writing that lay outside *The New Yorker*'s bounds. And some fiction the magazine probably *was* sorry to have missed. "Goodbye, Columbus" is reported to have been turned down because the story involves an item Shawn considered unprintable, a diaphragm. ("A circular cervical construction" was evidently not proposed as a substitute.)

For many people, the quintessence of *New Yorker* style is the style of "Talk of the Town"—the style of "We enjoy a parade as much as the next fellow, so when an invitation to the first annual Lite Beer Drinkers of America parade crossed our desk the other day," etc. The much-parodied first-person-plural voice is a consequence of the circumstance that for many years all "Talk" items were written by one person, relying on the notes of individual reporters. This was Thurber's job in the early days, and later it was Gill's. With the arrival of reporters like Mark Singer and Ian Frazier in the early '70s, "Talk" became more of a competition of stylistic virtuosity; but the vestigial "we" tended to hang on.

"Talk" style reflects Ross's hatred of knowingness, which is indeed the bane of much of the higher literary journalism in America. The tales of Ross's ignorance have been told often enough—that he once queried "William Blake" in a manuscript; that he asked a fact checker whether Moby Dick was the captain or the whale. The stories get repeated in part because a kind of virtue is understood to attach to such ignorance: it is, after all, superior to pretension. This is the virtue expressed in the ordinary-man style of "Talk of the Town."

Thurber once submitted a "Talk" item to Ross for editing and got it back in this form (Ross's emendations are italicized):

> For those who exclaim over armor, *a thing pretty rare with us*, the three new suits the museum has just come by will prove enthralling. One of them, a richly ornamented Spanish war harness, has more pieces of réchange, *or you might say accessories*, than any other battle suit in the world. . . . Among other prizes of the New Accession Room is the lid of an amphora, *but we never did find out what an amphora is.*

This is a style that has things all ways at once: the trendy or pretentious event (such as it is) is reported; whatever filaments of the experience might be suspected of trendiness or pretension are mocked; and the mockery is ostensibly at the writer's expense, so no one need feel offended. The writer has found his way to the party, but he chooses to stay on the fringe. He'd *like* to be on the inside, maybe, but, oh dear, just finding a taxi was quite enough excitement for one afternoon. The attitude can be read as modesty, or as the politest possible put-down.

Thurber and White were masters of this persona, and S. J. Perelman produced a brilliantly rococo version of it. It shows a different face in the magazine's serious fiction, where the technological and epistemological befuddlement of the "Talk" and humor pieces is exchanged for the moral befuddlement that comes with life in the upper-middle-class bubble. *New Yorker* short story writers succeeded in generating an extraordinary pathos from this befuddlement; and although it has long since been imitated to the point of cliché, the pathos was not a false one. The *New Yorker* story expressed with great precision the inner life of a certain kind of midcentury American: well-off but insecure, well-educated but without culture, enlightened enough to know how morally dark the world is in which he moves, but without a clue about how to live beyond it.

In its classic form, the story comes in a lighter and a darker version. In the lighter—in White's "The Second Tree from the Corner," Cheever's "The Country Husband," Updike's "The Happiest I've Been"—the ache is a part of ordinary experience; it is first built up by the accumulation of trivial failures and humiliations, then soothed by the machinery of a momentary epiphany whose materials are taken from the world as it is. In the darker version—in Stafford's "Children Are Bored on Sunday," Brodkey's "Sentimental Education," Salinger's "A Perfect Day for Bananafish"—the ache does not belong to the world; it comes from some demon outside, so that the world is unequipped to console it, and the life breaks apart. The essential psychological condition in both versions, the condition that is the source both of the pathos and, when it happens, of the consolation, is powerlessness.

Something of the same spirit of self-effacement informs what is surely the most successful and inimitable of the magazine's genres, the *New Yorker* cartoon. Many long-time *New Yorker* subscribers like to confess, in a typically *New Yorker* denial of cultural pretension, that they never *read* the thing, they only look at the cartoons. (They rarely confess to the obvious corollary to this, which is that they also look at the ads. Subscribers may not read anything in *The New Yorker*, but they turn every page.)

The distinctive feature of the *New Yorker* cartoon, as Michael Wood pointed out many years ago, is that the comic situation is not visual, but verbal. In the beginning, in fact, *New Yorker* artists supplied only the drawings; the captions were considered too important to trust to them, and were provided by the writers. Helen Hokinson, for instance, the creator of a staple *New Yorker* caricature of the 1930s and '40s, the Ladies' Club president with the imperious bust, never wrote a single caption. The dialogue in the famous Carl Rose cartoon of a mother and child at the dinner table—"It's broccoli, dear." "I say it's spinach, and I say the hell with it"—was written by E. B. White.

Of course, there are *New Yorker* artists whose drawings don't require captions—Saul Steinberg and William Steig, for example—or for whom the caption is often secondary to the image—Charles Addams and more recently Gahan Wilson. But in the standard *New Yorker* cartoon, the drawing is the excuse for a caption; so that the same settings have tended to turn up again and again: two men at a bar, a man and a woman on a desert island (a topos now largely abandoned), a pollster conducting an interview, a husband and wife in their living room, a man at his desk, people at a cocktail party, two animals talking. (Gill reports that once, in an effort to reduce the backlog of talking animal drawings, the magazine printed an issue that ran *only* talking animal drawings; he says nobody noticed.)

The humor in these cartoons is always

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in the language. What is funny is not what is said—it's rarely a double entendre (as in, say, a *Playboy* cartoon) or topical satire (as in an editorial cartoon in a newspaper). What is funny is the language used to say it. If the scene is a cocktail party, the language is fatuous; if it is a man in a bathtub talking to his cats, it is grandiose; if it is a middle-aged couple in their living room, it is melodramatic. Children speak with adult cynicism; barflies utter solemn pedantries; animals talk in psychobabble. These captions are comic imitations of the speech of *New Yorker* readers—displaced onto harmless caricatures. It is a highly cultivated form of wit, one that flatters and teases at the same time; and, as the history of the magazine proves, it is eternally reusable.

IV.

After the 1920s *The New Yorker* began running cartoons on most of its covers. During the '30s the drawings tended to be composed of stock elements of upper-class life: doormen, butlers, chauffeurs, mink-stoled Park Avenue matrons, top-hatted clubmen—occasionally thrown into discomfiting contact with the lower orders.

When the war began, the magazine executed one of its canny repositionings. Domestic circulation fell off, so a scaled-down edition of the magazine without advertising—called a "pony" edition—was made available to troops overseas. Serious reporters like Kahn, Robert Shaplen, and A. J. Leibling were dispatched to the front; cartoons of life in the armed forces began appearing on the covers and inside; and there were two powerful and uncharacteristic *New Yorker* covers, both by Christina Malman, that referred directly to the war: a 1940 charcoal of soldiers herding a crowd of civilians whose faces are turned away, and a 1945 drawing celebrating the human dimension of the Allied victory. By the end of the war, the pony edition was outselling the parent magazine; and when the soldiers returned and the great middle-class boom of the postwar era started up, *The New Yorker* had already won its slice of the new audience.

But the magazine was careful to continue to insist on just a slice. In the 1930s Fleischmann had taken the trouble to have the magazine's phone number unlisted in order to discourage new subscribers, and this policy of limiting readership was continued. By the mid-'50s *The New Yorker* ranked 72nd in circulation among American magazines, but it ranked third in ad pages. Between 1957 and 1964, it sold more ad pages than any other magazine in the country; by 1963 it was realizing a ten percent profit on a $21 million gross. In 1965 it sold 6,092 ad pages, beating its closest competitor, *Business Week*, by almost 1,300 pages.

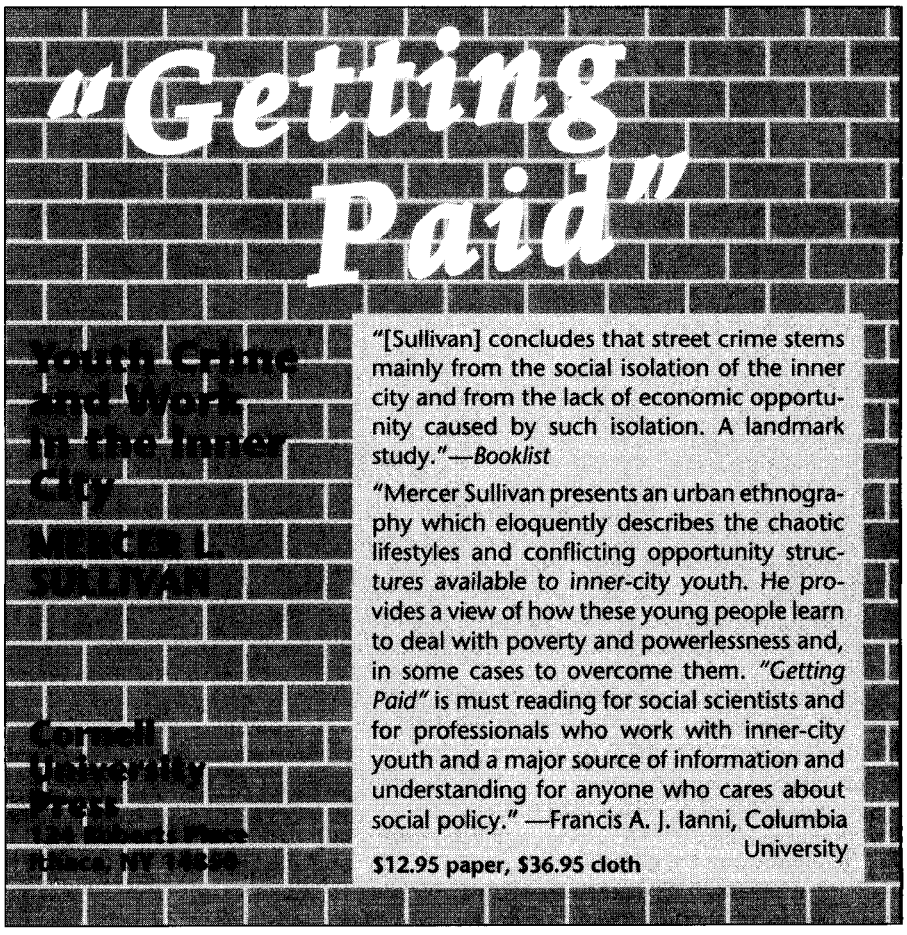
And the magazine was turning down three-quarters of a million dollars of business a year. Ads for goods considered too down-market for *New Yorker* readers, like ads for Sears, Roebuck, or deemed distasteful by Shawn, like ads for lingerie, were routinely rejected. In 1966, the year after Tom Wolfe's "murderous" article, *The New Yorker* reached its sales peak with 6,143 ad pages.

And then, very suddenly, the roller coaster began to run the other way. In 1967 the magazine lost 500 ad pages; it lost another 400 in 1968, 500 more in 1969, 700 in 1970. Circulation began to slip. People who worked in the magazine's ad department started returning calls.

You can read what was happening on the covers. The human figure (as John Updike notes in his foreword to *The Complete Book of Covers*) begins to disappear from the *New Yorker* cover around the time of the Cuban missile crisis; by the mid-'60s a steady annual proportion of landscape covers has been established. By the 1970s the cartoon cover with a human subject is a rarity. There are Cape Cod cottage exteriors, cityscapes framed by apartment windows, flowers and teapots, Steigs and Steinbergs and Korens. But apart from an occasional appearance by one of Charles Saxon's overweight suburban dignitaries, the human caricature has mostly vanished.

The New Yorker had lost its sense of its audience as a recognizable social type. It knew what its readers' *taste* was, or ought to be. But it didn't have a very secure sense any longer of what its readers looked like. By 1970 the *New Yorker* audience, once a homogeneous, rooted social entity, had started to splinter. It was holding together only through a common sensibility, a shared bundle of tastes; and those tastes had begun to seem more and more ephemeral, less and less worth preserving, every year.

Updike suggests that one way you can entertain yourself with *The Complete Book of Covers from "The New Yorker"* is to pick a year that was eventful for you and see what was on the covers. If you were born after 1945, this is likely to be a fruitless exercise. These are some covers from the summer of 1968: June 29, students studying quietly in a library; July 6, dog sleeping on a porch, American flag hanging from the railing; July 13, distant figures on a beach; August 10, middle-aged man in a rowboat confronted by a giant inflatable beach toy; August 17, generic politician addressing half a dozen microphones; August 24,


"Getting Paid"
Youth Crime and Work in the Inner City
MERCER L. SULLIVAN
Cornell University Press
"[Sullivan] concludes that street crime stems mainly from the social isolation of the inner city and from the lack of economic opportunity caused by such isolation. A landmark study."—Booklist
"Mercer Sullivan presents an urban ethnography which eloquently describes the chaotic lifestyles and conflicting opportunity structures available to inner-city youth. He provides a view of how these young people learn to deal with poverty and powerlessness and, in some cases to overcome them. "Getting Paid" is must reading for social scientists and for professionals who work with inner-city youth and a major source of information and understanding for anyone who cares about social policy." —Francis A. J. Ianni, Columbia University
$12.95 paper, $36.95 cloth

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sunflowers; August 31, middle-aged vacationer in jacket and bow tie preparing for a cocktail party at a beach house. In short, nothing to suggest that the inner and outer life of the summer of 1968 was not exactly like the inner and outer life of the summer of 1958.

If you look inside these issues at the "Notes and Comment" section—which serves, in effect, as *The New Yorker*'s lead editorial—you find, along with observations on the effects of the drought on home gardening and a piece on jogging ("Joggers surround us these days . . ."), two items of symptomatic importance. One is a reflection on current events:

> We grow increasingly disturbed these days, not just by the news but by its inexplicable lack of continuity. . . . In wartime, we formerly kept a map of the world with colored pins, and were globally anxious, for there was never any question of the whole not being the sum of all the parts. . . . We have been thinking of getting out our map again, except that now it must be hopelessly out of date. Perhaps what we need is some sort of situation map of the world on our front pages.

It is the return of the Thurberite nebbish, fretful that making sense of the world is much too big a task, but not quite sure whether people who pretend to make sense of it are not being a little pompous. Excuse us for being so unsophisticated, but maybe it's all really much simpler than everybody seems to think; maybe we could put a sort of situation map on the front page. . . . It is a politics of pure whimsy, and it is therefore a politics nobody in 1968 was likely to be paying much attention to.

The second item of interest is a comment on an announcement by the *Saturday Evening Post* of its plan to reduce circulation from nearly seven million readers to three million: "The *Post* will focus on the prime markets, forget the rest," the announcement said. The "Notes and Comment" writer has great, derisory fun with this concept of limiting circulation to the desirable zip codes ("We found all this hypnotic, and immediately began to wonder about our personal zip code," and so forth), and finishes up with a parodic acceptance of this crass new way of running a magazine: "There will be (as there always are) some people who will carp at these developments, and whine about the Media's Responsibility to the Demographically Undesirable. . . ."

The point isn't simply that the editorial side of *The New Yorker* had completely lost touch with the commercial reality of its own enterprise. It's that the rest of the magazine world had finally caught on to *The New Yorker*'s commercial secret, and the editors of *The New Yorker* had no idea what was happening.

But the magazine found a response. In January 1969 Shawn made a move to solve the problem with the magazine's politics by assigning political "Notes and Comment" pieces to Jonathan Schell, who went on to produce over 100 between 1969 and 1975. The magazine began providing serious, critical coverage of the Vietnam War, and it published the serial version of Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*. It had been compelled, against every instinct, to choose sides.

The New Yorker's choices were limited by its own tradition. It had never sponsored much more than a genteel (though global) anti-politics. White's "Notes and Comment" pieces of the early '40s were primarily devoted to promoting the idea of world government. And the magazine's great reportorial coups "Hiroshima" and "Silent Spring," as politically influential as they proved to be, were the sort of pieces that appeal most to people whose distrust of—or indifference to—everyday politics is already complete. The persona that pretended to regard getting a taxi as a trial of sensibility naturally tended to view greater issues in an apocalyptic light. "They never dreamed that the world's inelegance could become so dangerous," is the way Robert Warshow characterized the magazine's politics in 1947.

With Schell and Reich the out-of-ordinary-politics tone became an above-ordinary-politics tone. The tone worked well for many readers when the issues of the day—Vietnam and Watergate—could be addressed by moral fervency alone. When the issues became politically more complex later in the decade, the fervency, in pieces by Schell and others, began to seem like stridency—and the writing even acquired, most uncharacteristically, a partisan political rhetoric.

But the real problem was that simply to choose any side was, from the point of view of the demographic position the magazine commanded, to give up ground. "There was a change in the character of the readers" after 1969, J. Kenneth Bosee, the magazine's treasurer, told Gigi Mahon. "The numbers didn't change, but where there were top executives of Fortune 500 companies, now they were replaced with a bunch of kids. The thrust was to a lower audience. The demographics never went up again."

Still, the roller-coaster ride bottomed out. The contents, after all, had remained strong. In that same summer of 1968, the magazine ran (looking at July and August alone): Jane Kramer's memorable two-part profile of Allen Ginsberg; long pieces on the Kennedy assassination conspiracy theorist Jim Garrison by Edward Jay Epstein, and "The Graduate" by Jacob Brackman; a joint profile of Chet Huntley and David Brinkley by William Whitworth; a "European Diary" by Lewis Mumford; stories by Saul Bellow ("Mosby's Memoirs"), Donald Barthelme, Woody Allen, Larry Woiwode, Isaac Babel. These are not only things you would have been happy to read in 1968; these are things you would be happy to read in any magazine today.

In the 1970s, thanks to some uncharacteristically aggressive leadership on the business side, circulation did pick up slightly, the magazine sold more ad pages rather than fewer each year, and, most significantly, overall revenues increased substantially. But all the time, other magazines were trying and succeeding where the *Saturday Evening Post* had failed—in targeting the same slice of the demographic pie *The New Yorker* had largely had to itself for 50 years. The general circulation magazine was being replaced by the magazine edited with an upper-quintile household income firmly in mind. *Life* was gradually giving way to *HG*.

As the prestige of *The New Yorker* began to suffer from competition and from the critical sniping that competition encouraged, Shawn seems to have fallen back on the belief that since it was the disinterested pursuit of editorial perfection that had made *The New Yorker* a success in the first place, an even more fiercely disinterested pursuit of perfection was the only remedy for whatever ailed it now. So that at times during Shawn's last years as editor, the magazine seemed a parody of itself—running things like E. J. Kahn's enormous multipart series on corn, soybeans, potatoes, rice; publishing reviews of unnoticed books months or years after they had come out; letting topical reports from Washington and reviews of Hollywood movies of no special moment run to tens of thousands of words; serializing the memoirs of the childhoods of *New Yorker* writers.

In the 1980s the great upper-middle-class economic boom inspired dozens of magazines to reposition themselves at the top of the market in order to attract luxury advertising, effectively finishing off the trend that had begun in the late '60s. When *The New Yorker* failed to respond to these pressures from the rest of the industry, some major stockholders on the magazine's board of directors grew uneasy. When one of them decided

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to unload a sizable block of shares, Newhouse had his opportunity.

V.

In 1985, soon after *The New Yorker* had been sold, Shawn wrote a "Notes and Comment" piece designed to defend the magazine's editorial position against possible encroachment by the new ownership, and to reassure the magazine's readers. "We, the editorial people," he explained, "knew by instinct that to be able to make *The New Yorker* the magazine we wanted it to be we had to separate ourselves from the business side of the venture.... In this atmosphere of freedom, we have never published anything in order to sell magazines, to cause a sensation, to be controversial, to be popular or fashionable, to be 'successful.'" The analysis is entirely correct, and it explains the true genius of *The New Yorker*.

Nearly all American culture is commercial. It is either market-driven, as in the case of popular music, paperback fiction, and movies; or it is advertising-driven, as in the case of radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. And this culture is, of course, only an aspect of the American way of life generally, in which virtually every good—food, housing, furniture, clothing, cars, shaving cream—is understood to be designed to extract the greatest possible profit from the market conditions available, and to be susceptible to alteration the instant those conditions change. Because it is the chief tool for making conditions change, thereby creating new areas of demand and new sources of profit, advertising has become for most people the symbol of the utter commercialism of American life.

Everyone participates in this system, and partakes of its benefits (individual economic opportunity and national economic expansion) and puts up with its drawbacks (cheap goods, an often banal popular culture, financial uncertainty). The group that has benefited the most from this way of life, and that has done the most to shape it and to keep the system producing more of it, is the group of upper-middle-class professionals—lawyers, bankers, stockbrokers, designers, advertising executives, editors, publishers, high-level businessmen, television producers, and the college professors who educated them. These people were made possible—made necessary, in fact—by the spectacularly successful commercialization of American life in the 20th century; for they supply its creative and analytic intelligence. They are the society's most highly prized and highly rewarded members.

But this group has always demonstrated one peculiarity. Its tastes, its values, its lifestyle are all anti-commercial. The Wall Street banker lives like a member of the English gentry in a mock-Tudor mansion in Mount Kisco. The Madison Avenue adman has a place in Vermont with outdoor plumbing and no electricity. The television producer buys his filet at an old-fashioned butcher, where it is wrapped in old-fashioned butcher paper. The publisher of a magazine for teenage girls watches public television—or has a passion for Mozart, or Trollope, or vintage wines. He vacations in the cathedral towns of France. He doesn't like motorboats, or billboards, or big American cars. And so forth. His face is turned away from the culture that gives him his living.

The upper-middle-class professional has these tastes and values because they are part of his socialization. In mid-century America, this man was, prototypically, the graduate of an Ivy League college, married to the graduate of a select women's college or a major university. His and his wife's education stressed the values of the liberal arts, which were understood to be opposed to everything transient and commercial. The consumables in their world were not mass-market; the features they shopped with an eye to were traditionalism, craftsmanship, longevity.

Of course, this couple represented a market—by virtue of their income and education, a highly desirable market. But they were not people susceptible to any-

LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI

"Unquestionably one of the truly original philosophers of our time and a consummate teller of tales."*

Here he is in both incarnations:

As philosopher

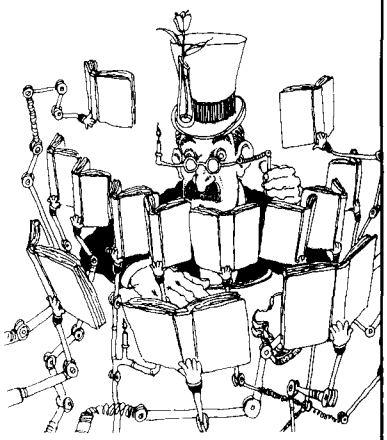
THE PRESENCE OF MYTH Translated by Adam Czerniawski

No matter how hard man strives for rational thought, Kolakowski argues, he cannot escape the mythical ideas and images that are the essence of human culture and civilization. Encompassing such areas as philosophy of science, political theory, religion, and the theory of culture, Kolakowski shows that the element of mythic thought permeates all forms of human endeavor – technological, artistic, linguistic, moral, even sexual. "We have waited all too long for this important essay by a philosopher who more convincingly than any other I can think of demonstrates the continuing significance of his vocation in the life of our culture."–Karsten Harries, *New York Times Book Review*
$19.95 cloth

As teller of tales

TALES FROM THE KINGDOM OF LAILONIA & THE KEY TO HEAVEN Translated by Agnieszka Kolakowska and Salvator Attanasio

This volume offers readers a double treat. *Tales from the Kingdom of Lailonia*, translated into English for the first time, consists of thirteen charmingly satiric tales about people and events in a fictional country. All contain nuggets of philosophical wisdom relevant to our time. The tales in *The Key to Heaven*, which include one censored in Poland and never before published, are all taken from the Old Testament. "Delightful and wise studies that offer the reader much that is crucial for understanding both contemporary thought and himself. An enchanting experience." – *Erazim Kohák
31 line drawings $16.95 cloth



The University of Chicago Press

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thing that smacked of opportunism or commercialism. Nor could they be reached by gossip about the successful and celebrated. Their taste—their great virtue, really—was for the self-effacing, the unpretentious, the literate and witty. They were secure enough to enjoy poking fun at themselves and their world; that was part of the nobility of their sense of humor. And it was a satisfaction, given their view of commerce and coercion, to imagine themselves to be ineffectual, silly, powerless. But they were insecure enough to require assurance that they would not be "out-browed"—that they would find their cultural experiences accessible and unthreatening, without being flavorless or incurious or prudish.

The New Yorker looks terrific, as everyone knows, on a coffee table. Its covers are invariably pleasing, and some of them are modestly artful. (*The Complete Book of Covers from "The New Yorker"* is, in a sense, the ultimate coffee-table book.) But the most distinctive design feature of the *New Yorker* cover is that it says nothing about what is inside. Unlike the cover of every other commercial magazine in America, the cover of *The New Yorker* is not a piece of advertising.

In fact, *nothing* in *The New Yorker* is advertised. For most of its history it ran no table of contents. Its reported pieces carry generic titles: "Reporter at Large," and in much smaller print: "Soybeans." There may be, by way of illustration, a small, hand-lettered map. There is no accompanying blurb ("You will never feel the same way about this amazing foodstuff again!"). There are no pull-quotes or subheads. The writer's name appears only at the end, in type that is the same point size as the type in which the article is printed.

The cynical explanation for this is that the editorial matter in *The New Yorker* is subdued (until very recently, for instance, no color) so that the ads will be more vivid. That may be how it worked for the advertisers; but Shawn was right. On the editorial side, the idea really was to give the *New Yorker*'s readers what they wanted: a straight dose of fiction, poetry, reportage, and criticism, without patronizing hype or help. If soybeans didn't interest you, you were free to turn the page (well, pages).

If you grew up in a household in which *The New Yorker* was a constant presence, you probably retain, whatever reservations your superior sophistication now requires you to make, a residual fondness for the magazine's cultural traditions. If you grew up in one of those households and had an interest in the arts, you are likely still to feel a debt to one or another of the magazine's regular critics: Harold Rosenberg on art, Arlene Croce on dance, Pauline Kael on movies. And if you had an interest in becoming a writer yourself, the magazine almost surely formed part of your sense of what good writing was like. But the anti-commercialism, the carefully maintained distance from the crass, capitalist world, will not mean to you what it meant to your parents.

For among today's upper-middle-class professionals, the separation between culture and commerce has collapsed. Nor is the sense of membership in a common taste group as strong as it was; the social class of professionals is much less homogeneous than it used to be, and the education those people receive is less of a pious and clubby affair. And they do not find the pose of ineffectuality attractive.

Of course, upper-middle-class tastes still run to the traditional, the custom-built, the exclusive. But there is no special conscience about the relation between these tastes and the values of the marketplace. There is often, in fact, a kind of promiscuous delight in the commercialism of upscale pleasures, and an uninhibited interest in whatever mid- and mass-market experiences seem attractive. The younger professional today has become so adept at reading the language of advertisement and promotion that it has become a stimulation to be welcomed rather than a blight to be evaded.

There are surely as many things that are hateful about this new upper-middle-class cast of mind as there were about the old one; but there are surely many things to be admired about it, too. It is an audience that could use a little help understanding which things are which. *The New Yorker*'s market is still there, but it's wearing a different face. Maybe the magazine will put on another face to meet it. •

The Hard-Line Blues

BY BARRY M. BLECHMAN

The Great Universal Embrace: Arms Summitry—A Skeptic's Account by Kenneth L. Adelman

(Simon and Schuster, 368 pp., $19.95)

Command of the Seas: A Personal Story by John F. Lehman

(Scribners, 320 pp., $21.95)

The senior figures in Ronald Reagan's national security team have yet to deliver themselves of their memoirs of power (except Nancy, of course). Still, there is no need to wait on the edge of your chair for Caspar Weinberger's fond look back at the Strategic Defense Initiative, or George Shultz's account of the triumph over communism, or Robert McFarlane's reasons for cakes and keys and sealing wax. Two "key players" from the sub-Cabinet have stepped forward, each with a similarly curious book—part memoir, part policy tract. In fact, these books, by Kenneth Adelman, who was Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency from 1983 to 1987, and John Lehman, who was Secretary of the Navy from 1981 to 1987, are probably more interesting than the memoirs of their superiors will be.

Now in their mid-40s, Adelman and Lehman honestly and enthusiastically reflect the Reaganite mentality and the neoconservative sectarianism that came to dominate American foreign and defense policy around 1980. They didn't adopt the principles of Ronald Reagan's approach to world affairs after the election, as some of the more senior figures may have; Adelman and Lehman were among the shock troops of the Reagan revolution. Breaking deliberately with the foreign policy establishment of the 1970s, which was dominated by multilateralism and premature cold-war-endism, both men worked hard and successfully to undermine the Carter Administration and to elect Reagan. Each was rewarded with a government position that seemed well beyond their years and their experience.

Both Adelman and Lehman entered

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office with powerful ambitions, and with personalities that are unorthodox by Washington's rigid standards, and therefore suspect. Each brought to office a wide-ranging agenda, each was determined to transform American policy in important ways. Yet the principles of national security policy embraced by both men were repudiated by a citizenry that remembers Vietnam as only the most recent demonstration of the effects of military adventures on ordinary people, and that prefers low taxes to strong defenses; and, in the unkindest cut of all, they were repudiated, too, by President Reagan, hotly in pursuit of a place in history as a man of peace. Indeed, the approach to world affairs exemplified by these books already has an air of dotage about it—one of those things of the 1980s, like slam dancing and junk bond trading, that future generations will recall with perplexity.

In the end, they were defeated by the very establishments and bureaucracies that they held in contempt, and by the enduring realities of the American system of government. Lehman wanted, thirsted, to build a 600-ship Navy to implement a national strategy based on maritime superiority. Ignoring the historical evidence for the limits of sea power, Lehman sought a Navy so expensive that it could be sustained only by diminishing other key elements of American military power, to carry out policies that the Navy itself, or at least its most senior officers, recognized as unnecessarily provocative and, in the end, counterproductive. Lehman's pursuit of these goals served his personal ambition as well as his strategic agenda; indeed, one could never be sure where one began and the other ended.

He started brilliantly, but finally his management of the department was so clumsy that it fractured the political and bureaucratic support needed to achieve his goals. The Navy will soon have 500 ships, and the maritime strategy is currently being revised. Adelman, similarly, wanted to end the American obsession with arms control and replace it with a greater appreciation of diplomatic arrangements and unilateral actions, but his administration bequeathed to its successor an arms control agenda more ambitious in scope and in detail than could have been imagined a few years ago.

The two books have a lot in common. Each has turned out to be less burning and topical than the publishers must have hoped; each is structured oddly, apparently the result of last-minute changes that do not work very well. Adelman's book has interesting passages, but Lehman's is virtually without redemption. Arrogant, repetitive, superficial, boorish, mean, and poorly written, the book describes a black-and-white world of villains and heroes. Truth has little to do with Lehman's portrayal of events, and facts are bothersome intrusions. Lapsing frequently into the newspeak of defense analysis, a language that resembles English but not by much, it punctuates its distorted accounts of events in the United States and abroad with didactic policy lectures in technical gibberish.

Lehman has always relished trouble. As a young staffer on the National Security Council in 1972, he was employed by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger as a hatchet man, to purge the bureaucracy of military and foreign service officers, career bureaucrats, and seasoned political appointees who had the poor taste in 1972 to negotiate the ABM Treaty and the Interim Agreement on offensive nuclear forces, or SALT I. The purge was a favor to Senator Henry Jackson, to elicit his grudging support of the agreements, and it ruined the careers of a number of dedicated public servants whose only mistakes were to have performed their jobs competently.

Born to privilege, well-educated, articulate, hardworking, Lehman is a case study of an elite's bad boy, who feels immune from the constraints of history, powerful interests, and routine, who cannot distinguish between his own desires and the interests of his country. Leaving government before the end of Reagan's second term, Lehman became a key supporter of candidate George Bush, traveling with him on the campaign trail. He was widely expected to become Bush's next national security adviser, but his prospects dimmed suddenly and irrevocably when the "Ill Wind" Pentagon scandal broke in the summer. The press drew national attention to corruption in the Navy's procurement system; Lehman's management of the service had been, it seemed, naive. The investigation is not yet concluded, though so far it has 33 convictions to its credit and has collected nearly $30 million in fines from defense contractors. The biggest fish reportedly are still to be indicted; newspaper accounts suggest that Melvyn Paisley, one of Lehman's closest associates in the Pentagon, may be the target of the web of prosecutions.

But the knaves of "Ill Wind" do not appear as knaves in Lehman's book, which is full of knaves. Of course, there are some heroes too—well, at least one hero. *Command of the Seas* is a paean to its author. The others who earn kind words are, invariably, "warriors," "tough,"

FROM A CELL, BEAUTY

...Ernesto Diaz Rodriguez has been one of Cuba's plantados, *prisoners who refuse to "reform," for more than twenty years. Initially set at fifteen years, his term was extended to forty years after he was charged with "conspiring to overthrow the Cuban regime" from his cell.*

Mr. Diaz has been beaten and deprived of basic rights in all the Cuban jails that he has inhabited. PEN, an international group of writers has taken his case.

Mr. Diaz wrote the Bell of Dawn *for his sons and for children everywhere. Wholly devoid of bitterness and anger, the* Bell of Dawn *is written in the key of hope. Images of life's renewal in Nature abound:* "Oh, my son, if only I could/with a plough of frost/that holds my throat so tight/do you know what I would do?/First I'd plant white roses.

Astonishingly, these lines were smuggled on miniscule sheets of paper, and Mr. Diaz has not stopped writing. The Cuban regime must free him. Surely it realizes by now that it will never break the spirit of a man who sings to children from his punishment cells. Cuba's jailers have succeeded only in making Ernesto Diaz Rodriguez's voice purer and his universal message deeper.

(Excerpted from a Miami Herald editorial, Sept. 12, 1989.)

If you want to help Mr. Diaz please send your appeal for his immediate release to: *Comandante en Jefe, Fidel Castro, Havana, Cuba.*

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"hands-on," "hard-charging," and "effective." The most admired are those, like Lehman, who fly airplanes. The first time we meet the aforementioned Paisley, for example, he is described as "the right man for the job. . . . An air force fighter ace with nine Messerschmitt kills to his credit." (Lehman is so taken with Paisley that he introduces him again 48 pages later, in almost the same words.) Lehman never explains why a talent for aerial dogfights should help someone manage billion dollar programs to develop and manufacture advanced aircraft efficiently.

The Navy's enemies are legion, according to Lehman. "Most threatening of all of the [Navy's] critics," he says, "were the OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] and JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] bureaucracies." (The book is full of acronyms; in tone it's far closer to a Pentagon memorandum than to prose.) The problem, for Lehman, is that "warriors," when they leave the field and are assigned to staff positions, somehow become hidebound, toothless "bureaucrats," intent on sinking the Navy. In one of his many distortions of fact, Lehman speaks of the Joint Staff and the Office of the Secretary of Defense as "career bureaucracies." "The average OSD and JCS bureaucrat, civilian and military," he says, "stays 30 years." This is nonsense. Military officers, who fill virtually all the Joint Staff positions and roughly one-third of those in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, remain less than three years, on average, in these positions; civilians tend to remain longer, but rarely 30 years. But let's not allow facts to get in the way of a good riff.

The list of the enemies goes on. It is so long, in fact, that it is nothing short of amazing that the Secretary of the Navy accomplished anything at all. The villains include "Europeanists" (or anyone opposing Lehman's pet theory of the maritime strategy), "armchair strategists" (or anyone working on military issues who disagrees with Lehman), "military reformers" (or critics of Lehman's favored high-tech approach to naval strategy), "liberal intellectuals," "détentists," and some journalists.

And there are more. Congress is a frequent target, particularly—get this—Congressional interns. (Lehman maintains that those sweet, clear-eyed 18-year-olds are the people who rewrite the Navy's budget each year. I wonder if Sam Nunn and John Warner know that.) And all defense contractors are knaves in Lehman's world; and, strangely, so is one of the contractors' chief opponents, Hyman Rickover. Lehman's most intriguing revelation, however, is that *admirals are destroying the Navy*. He maintains that Navy promotions are controlled by evil admirals, individuals who prefer "bureaucrats" to "warriors." Lehman recounts how he tried to intervene in the promotion system; he wanted "to promote balance," he says, but the Navy establishment, cynics all, had the idea that he simply was promoting cronies.

What an odd idea. Consider one of Lehman's personal favorites, Admiral "Ace" Lyons. Lyons was promoted twice in five years at Lehman's behest, ending up as commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet. In his last post, this newly minted four-star admiral distinguished himself by initiating simulated air attacks against Petropavlovsk, an important Soviet naval base in Siberia. Over a period of several years, armed U.S. aircraft actually flew attack missions against the base, pulling up just short of Soviet air space. Shenanigans like this were the rule, rather than the exception, for a few years in the mid-1980s. ("Ace" was permitted to retire within months of Lehman's resignation.)

It is commonly understood in Washington that Lehman was forced out as Secretary because of his repeated intrusions into the Navy's promotion system, culminating in a major conflict with the Navy's uniformed establishment in 1987. Without admitting his reasons for resigning, Lehman draws a noble picture of his departure. "I felt like the retiring marshal of the Old West, backing out of the saloon with guns blazing because every punk wants to take a shot at him." The imagery is appropriate to the mentality of the Reagan national security satrapy. In Lehman's case, this perspective of the underdog, of the prophet without honor, persisted for seven years.

Kenneth Adelman's book is more readable and more honest. Adelman, too, is not modest about himself and his accomplishments, but he writes with some style and sometimes even with grace, and he has a sweet, self-deprecatory sense of humor. The book is hard going in parts, particularly when the author expounds his unfortunate theory of the "myth of arms control." Like Lehman, Adelman has a taste for deriding people with whom he disagrees; but his descriptions of the Reagan-Gorbachev summits, and particularly of the manner in which the Reagan Administration "prepared" for these events, are valuable.

Also like Lehman, Adelman is not too careful with the facts. He maintains, for example, that in 1963 the United States shared technology with the Soviet Union in order to increase the safety of nuclear weapons. But no source is given; and every official who would have had to know about such an exchange has denied this long-standing story. Adelman also repeats another enduring nuclear canard, that President Truman threatened the Soviets with atomic attacks to force them out of Iran in 1946. And he cheerfully claims that the space-based "devices" being explored for use in the Strategic Defense Initiative could not pass through the atmosphere, and thus could not possibly be used offensively, thereby retiring a key Soviet complaint about the program. This statement is so obviously false that it raises serious questions about the author's technical understanding of what was one of the central issues during his tenure in office.

The most annoying of the book's distortions, however, are those used to discredit opponents. Adelman shares Lehman's antipathy to Congress, though he's not mad at the interns. He frets repeatedly about Congressional efforts to stop the American anti-satellite program, but he fails to note that the program was a technical and financial disaster, or that the primitive Soviet program that was adduced to justify the American program was incapable of reaching most American satellites when it did work, which was not often. Nor does Adelman mention the strategic argument against the program that motivated many legislators: that the high-tech American armed forces were far more dependent on satellites, and hence on the absence of threats to them, than their Soviet counterparts.

Still, while Lehman's book is lost in a Haigian world, circa 1980, in which a Russian stands behind every Third World dictator and a Soviet plot is the cause of every threat to American interests, Adelman's book retains a relevance to contemporary matters. In his final chapter, Adelman addresses the historic developments in the Soviet Union and the role that arms control negotiations might (more to the point, might not) play in hastening constructive change in the world. But it is here that his observations are the most mischievous.

No criticism of Adelman is meant when I note that he was unable to predict the sweeping changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe. Nobody else foresaw the revolutions of 1989 either. Still, it is in Adelman's book that I find one of the clearest signs of how much the world has changed. Adelman lists three prerequisites for improved relations with the Soviet Union, which he insisted, less than a year ago, were farfetched. They are: "tear down the Berlin Wall . . . and reduce the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe"; "[request] the Soviets to

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lower their military spending below a wartime footing"; "request that they open up both information and emigration." All these farfetched developments are now with us, or behind us.

If Lehman's book highlights the malice of the Reagan Administration, Adelman's betrays its innocence. The author seems to have missed the vital significance of the history in which he was privileged to participate. It was on the basis of his fashionable pessimism, now happily outstripped by events, that this former Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency wrote a book for the purpose of discrediting arms control negotiations. This should come as no surprise, given Adelman's writings and beliefs prior to his confirmation hearings in 1983. Now he argues for what he calls "arms control without agreements," a diplomatic process that will result somehow in reciprocal but uncodified measures of unilateral disarmament.

This is a strange position for a Reaganaut so typically distrustful of the Russians: if they will violate arms control with agreements, why will they not violate arms control without agreements? And yet this view appears to have some currency. Adelman and other conservatives are lobbying hard with the Bush Administration to slow down progress in the Vienna talks on conventional forces in Europe, to prevent conclusion of the Geneva agreement on strategic forces, and to avoid a prohibition on chemical weapons. Their efforts will fail; the march of events is too powerful. Still, the weather that they make has already delayed the strategic agreement and could raise difficulties during the ratification process of any new treaty.

Adelman defends his beliefs, unconvincingly, by maintaining that arms control agreements cannot be comprehensive, that they cannot be verified sufficiently, that they cannot stabilize military relations, and that they cannot save money. His case is daily being refuted by events. In what he calls the "balloon principle," for example, he argues that "military capabilities pushed down by an arms accord in one area will pop up in others," noting that "reductions in tanks will heighten competition in artillery and aircraft." The draft conventional forces agreement on the table in Vienna, however, includes explicit restraints on tanks, *plus* artillery and aircraft—as well as on troop levels and armored fighting vehicles; there's not much left for the balloon to pop into. (Zeppelins, maybe.) The agreement, moreover, would cause a reduction of more than 50 percent in Soviet forces in Eastern Europe in exchange for a ten percent cut in NATO forces—thus ensuring the new independence of Eastern Europe and fulfilling Adelman's own most important objective.

Adelman's qualms about verification have become equally atavistic. American military officials have expressed satisfaction repeatedly with the arrangements in place to verify, for example, the 1987 Treaty on Intermediate Range Missiles, along with their confidence that its terms are being carried out satisfactorily. Some officials even have stated that the arrangements may have been excessive for the task. In fact, the Soviet Union has turned the verification issue completely on its head. Once resistant to even the most grudging forms of cooperation, their current position is, essentially, that they will go as far as we are willing to go; and this has caused U.S. representatives to back off in their demands for intrusive inspection rights in several negotiations. Suddenly on-site inspection has become a threat to *our* secrets.

Adelman's argument that arms control does not save money is equally hollow. Although reducing defense expenditures is not a good enough reason to seek arms control arrangements, it certainly is a possible result of them; the tens of billions of dollars not spent on the Safeguard anti-ballistic missile system as a result of the ABM Treaty is proof of that.

Adelman is perfectly correct to stress that arms control negotiations cannot be the engine for improved international relationships. Technical agreements to reduce arms, or to avoid deployments of certain kinds of weapons, can only follow from the achievement of closer political ties through changes in national policies. Everybody understands that things look so promising in Geneva and Vienna because of the reversals of Soviet policies initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev. Still, realism about the limits of arms control is no reason to dismiss its importance. By codifying mutual commitments to reduce armaments, by raising the political cost to nations of reversing relevant policies, and by establishing mechanisms to build confidence among adversaries that statements of peaceful intent are indeed being carried out, arms control agreements can serve as ratchets in an improving relationship. Even relatively minor confidence-building measures, such as those negotiated as part of the process through which European relations were transformed in the 1970s and 1980s, played such an ameliorating role, as did the arms control agreements concluded by the two superpowers as they began the climb out of the postwar period.

The future role of arms control, in other words, is absolutely vital. In Europe President Bush has been rudely presented with a historic opportunity to preside over the end of the cold war. Only with arms reduction agreements in place to codify, and to make possible the enforcement of, the commitment to peaceful policies can the East-West conflict truly be put aside, and vital issues, such as the question of Germany's future, be resolved. Similarly, in U.S.-Soviet relations, there is the opportunity not to abolish nuclear weapons, as Adelman tells us that Reagan so fervently hoped to do, but to create a stable balance of much smaller nuclear forces that can ensure each nation's security at lesser cost and lower risk. Even with the best of wills in each government, formal agreements are essential to make sure that the domestic determinants of arms decisions are confined within stable boundaries. Arms control agreements, in sum, are not sufficient to achieve these ends, but it is folly to deny that they are a crucial part of a profitable diplomatic strategy.

Finally, arms control has a role to play in reducing the long-term threats to American security from the proliferation of missiles, of nuclear and chemical weapons, and of other advanced military technologies to additional nations, particularly in the Third World. Does the solution to these problems lie in the deployment of extraordinarily expensive and uncertain strategic defenses, as

Against Whitman

Too many speak of whip-poor-wills
as if they knew them.
The trout is not my friend.
The Nicaraguan is a mystery.
Oh, I hear a whistling in the trees.
I hear them praying in their tents,
Sunday afternoons. God's creatures:
I don't even know their nesting place.
I suppose I've been a growling dog,
a dusk, a thunderstorm, an ant
creeping up a leg. Spit, testes,
pine sap, sewage, kisses, maple leaf.
God's sopranos, the whip-poor-wills
sing for hours at a time.
Do you suppose they mate for life?
I hardly know when I'm inside you.
Don't hate the stranger in me.
I also wish the wall of skin
were just a bridge to cross.

IRA SADOFF

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Adelman suggests? Or does it lie in a less flashy process, in the painstaking negotiation of multilateral agreements that over time—over decades, perhaps—can build a peaceful international system?

If history is the judge, the answer is clear. Beginning with Eisenhower's modest initiatives 35 years ago, intended largely to deflect domestic and international pressures against American nuclear policies, arms control has quite rightfully gained center stage in international politics. Despite the initial antipathy, arms negotiations became the central issue of U.S.-Soviet relations during the Reagan Administration, the overriding concern at summit meetings, the dominant issue in all high-level exchanges. This was not, as Adelman implies, because of the foolishness of Congress, the mendacity of the press, and the ignorance of the President. Arms negotiations gained their centrality because they are the one tangible means of capturing the most essential changes in relations between adversaries. They are the expression, and the instrument, of the hopes and the fears of ordinary people all over the world. For better or worse, whether the world moves toward a more enlightened international system or falls back to the terror of war and the prospect of annihilation, its movement will be foreshadowed and reflected in the secret back-channels, the dour corridor conversations, the hair-splitting bureaucratic finaglings, and the stiff formal meetings of what is coldly called the arms control process.

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Play Wystan for Me

BY SARA MOSLE

The Complete Works of W. H. Auden, Vol. I: Plays and Other Dramatic Writings, 1928-1938 by W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood edited by Edward Mendelson

(Princeton University Press, 680 pp., $35)

There's something unwieldy about Auden. On the narrow, hard bed of modernism, his works protrude in all directions. Critics have often found themselves, like Procrustes, chopping off whole arms and legs of his oeuvre just to bring it down to some sort of manageable size. Whack! Off flies the American Auden, his favorite broad panama hat, suggestive of the lunatic clergyman, rolling into the corner like a loose hubcap. Whack! Down drop those early, abstruse poems, never knew quite what to make of them anyway. Cut, cut, snip, snip, and the plays from the 1930s fall away, as do the travel books, the poems for film and radio, the long works from the middle years, the libretti, and those endless essays, all a bit tedious. Left is what you might call the standard English Auden cut: shorter poems, 1932-39. There are, of course, other critical frames to suit other tastes: the political, 1933-36; the religious, 1940-57; the obscure, 1927-32; the far-out, 1958-73.

This carving up of Auden's work has left his reputation mangled, and has influenced how he is read: in arbitrary and isolated chunks. Or rather, how he is not read. It's worth pointing out that Auden really isn't read, not in his entirety certainly, nor even that enthusiastically in his various parts; even in England, where the "English Auden" is mandatory reading, his later works go largely ignored. As a barometer of Auden's reputation, the most notable thing about the first volume of his collected works is how few have noted its appearance. One would think that the occasion would have prompted the sort of reconsiderations that invariably greet even the smallest milestones in the literary lives—and afterlives—of Eliot or Yeats. But the critics and the journals have been almost unanimously silent.

Ironically, it's partly Auden's early rise to fame that has eclipsed the achievements of his later writing. From the beginning, his reputation preceded him like a noisy stagehand into the literary spotlight of the 1930s. Looming through the doorways of his Oxford tutors and classmates, Auden didn't so much arrive on the scene as burst into it, a full-blown talent, his scowling putty-white face emerging, like a genie, out of a volcanic puff of cigarette smoke and ash. In the memoirs and the autobiographical novels of the period—in Stephen Spender's *The Temple* and *World Within World*, in Christopher Isherwood's *Lions and Shadows* and *Christopher and His Kind*—Auden (or his fictional surrogate) repeatedly appears, shocking and exhausting his friends with his portentous, witch-doctor-like utterances, his endless succession of hats, his titillating homosexual confessions, his merciless inquisitions, shamelessly poking, as Isherwood put it, "with his blunt finger" into all the infirmities of his peers.

There is remarkably little awkward Auden juvenilia. By the time he graduated from Oxford in 1928 at the age of 21, Auden had already found a mature poetic voice. The previous summer he had completed the first draft of *Paid on Both Sides*, a one-act tragedy in prose and verse, which was eventually his first piece of published writing. Spender privately printed an impressive selection of Auden's earliest poetry that same year.

The influence of Eliot and Yeats is apparent in Auden's early verse, but Hardy was Auden's first (and later, he said, his most influential) model. What he admired was Hardy's metrical dexterity and detachment, "his way of looking at life from a very great height, as in the stage directions of *The Dynasts*." Soon Auden was demonstrating a similar agility, moving easily among an array of traditional verse forms: sestinas, doggerel, ballads, and odes. As he celebrated many years later, "Blessed be all metrical rules that forbid automatic responses, / force us to have second thoughts, free from the fetters of Self."

Auden's poetry is occasionally didactic, but mostly he was skeptical of romantic notions of poetic inspiration, declining the artist's social role of moral arbiter. " 'The unacknowledged legislators of the world,' " he insisted, "describes the secret police, not the poets." Equally suspicious of the earnestness of "the *lacrimae rerum* note," he employed a wide range of poetic tones—the ominous, the slapstick, the ironic, the vulgar—often combining several kinds of verse in one long dramatic work. Even Auden's darkest and most somber poems swagger slightly.

In contrast to the modernists before him, who Auden complained "know more and more about less and less," his own poetic imagination, he liked to think, was more anarchic, like "a Mad Hatter's Tea-Party," at which might sit such disparate subjects as psychology, Nordic mythology, metalliferous mining,

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aviation, liturgies, and cooking. Unlike the parched-lipped Eliot, who lived for hierarchy and loved to rank great books, Auden expansively admitted every kind of experience into this "extraordinary democracy," refusing to make pedantic distinctions between the imaginative influence of "a book, a country walk, and a kiss."

It would be hard to exaggerate the overwhelming impression that the young Auden—both the person and the poetry—made on his friends and contemporaries. A few were nearly overcome:

> [T]here waited for me in the summer morning,
> Auden, fiercely. I read, shuddered and knew,

wrote one, Charles Madge, on first looking into Auden's poetry in 1933. What is most striking about the hero worship in Madge's lines is how Auden himself appears: not as a person, but as a symbol.

What Auden stood for was far from clear, but "Auden" became a kind of shorthand for a group of writers in the 1930s and the attitudes they supposedly espoused. The most prominent among them besides Auden—Cecil Day Lewis, Spender, Louis MacNeice, Isherwood—became the English brat pack of the 1930s. (Significantly, the two least daunted of Auden's friends were the most talented, Isherwood and MacNeice, with whom Auden collaborated.) So ubiquitous did these writers seem during the decade, and so firmly were they associated with Auden, that it became possible, as Julian Symons put it, to think of Auden not as an individual, but as a "many-headed monster . . . with all the little Audens taking up their poetical-political positions."

And so "Auden, Spender & Co." is how Orwell referred to them in his 1940 essay "Inside the Whale," "lumping them together simply according to tendency" with several other writers of widely varying talent. Orwell's essay has become, as Samuel Hynes has pointed out, one of the classic texts of the "Thirties Myth," in which the literature of the decade is reduced to period pieces, severely limited by their adherence to a discredited Communist ideology. For purposes of argument, Orwell quickly abbreviates his appellation to the much simpler "Auden," and proceeds to criticize a poem by "Auden" that is in fact by Day Lewis (a conflation typical of much 1930s criticism). But the real sting of Orwell's attack comes later. Taking exception to a reference in Auden's poem "Spain" to "the necessary murder," Orwell complains, in a famous passage that has probably done more damage to Auden's reputation than any other single piece of writing:

> It could only be written by a person to whom murder is at most a *word*. . . . Mr Auden's brand of amoralism is only possible if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled.

I'm not alone in thinking that Orwell misreads Auden's poem; a poem whose very subject is commitment and its consequences, "Spain" is anything but "amoral." Still, Orwell's criticism seems leveled not at the real Auden, but at the collective one. As Orwell himself concedes, Auden didn't write "about the Spanish war in quite the vein that was expected of [him]," that is, in the way that Orwell is condemning. In a much overlooked aside, Orwell admits that "incidentally [Auden's poem] is one of the few decent things that have been written about the Spanish war." "Spain" was the exception, not the rule, of the 1930s agitprop that Orwell justifiably despised.

The collective Auden bore only a vague resemblance to the real one. Unlike the real Auden, the collective Auden was an ardent Communist and wrote lots of bad verse. The collective Auden was also a celebrity. When Auden left in 1937 for the Spanish Civil War, a headline in the *Daily Worker* read, "FAMOUS POET TO DRIVE AMBULANCE IN SPAIN." As Isherwood remarked, had the real "Auden . . . been killed, or even died there of 'flu, he would doubtless have become a hero-poet like Byron or Rupert Brooke." But the real Auden didn't die. The collective one did.

The decade ended badly, and the collective Auden came to represent all the false hopes and the willful dishonesty that marked much of the writing and the politics of the period (though little of Auden's own). When Auden and Isherwood left for China in 1939 to report on the Sino-Japanese War, only two years after Auden's trip to Spain, "our departure," Isherwood noted, "inspired no one. The emotional climate had changed." In the real Auden's words, the "clever hopes" had expired "of a low dishonest decade," and most assumed that both Audens should be buried along with his epitaph.

The spotlight didn't leave Auden. He left it. Indeed, escaping the spotlight was his chief reason for going. He began to slip away as early as 1936—to Iceland, to Spain, to China—not to escape war, as some critics have suggested, but in the case of Spain and China, to journey to it. Auden later said that he decided to leave England that same year, while working on his play *The Ascent of F6*, a tragedy about a mountain climber who succumbs to the temptations of fame, destroying himself and his followers. "I knew I must leave [England] when I wrote it. . . . I knew then that if I stayed, I would inevitably become a member of the British establishment." The collective Auden had become poet laureate of the left. It was a position that the real Auden found increasingly untenable. In January 1939 Auden and Isherwood left England and Europe, boarding a boat for New York. As Auden later wrote in a poem about Melville, he hoped to sail "Past the Cape Horn of sensible success, / Which cries: 'This rock is Eden. Shipwreck here.' "

Auden continued to have "second thoughts." Protean and prolific, he wrote enough great poems from the late 1920s through the mid-1960s for several

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poets' careers. His collected works possess all the diversity and inclusiveness of a poetic movement, one that runs parallel to modernism, and only occasionally intersects it. The *Plays and Other Dramatic Writings*, the first in a projected series of eight volumes of Auden's collected works, edited by Edward Mendelson and handsomely published by Princeton, may seem like an inauspicious place to begin healing the fractured Auden canon. To some it will probably come as a surprise that Auden even wrote plays, let alone so many. This is a whopping volume: seven different plays, plus Auden's work for film and broadcast, nearly 500 pages of dramatic verse and prose in all—and this is just the first installment. The later dramatic works and libretti (with Chester Kallman), the essays and the reviews, and a new edition of the complete poems will fill the subsequent seven volumes. Few moderns have produced as much.

Included in this initial volume are two versions of Auden's well-known "charade," *Paid on Both Sides* (1928); three previously unpublished pieces, Auden and Isherwood's *The Enemies of the Bishop* (1929), a fragment from the first of Auden's "quest" plays, *The Fronny* (1930), both of which Auden later reworked into *The Chase* (1934). (None of these was ever staged.) More familiar are Auden's masque, *The Dance of Death* (1933), and his and Isherwood's collaborations, *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935), *The Ascent of F6* (1936), and *On the Frontier* (1937-38), which were all produced by The Group Theatre in London. Also here are Auden's screenplays for documentary film; his cabaret, *Alfred* (1936); and his script for radio, *Hadrian's Wall* (1937). Mendelson, who has admirably met an enormous editorial challenge, provides more than 200 pages of textual notes.

Auden was writing dramatic poetry long before his plays ever reached the stage. Except for his earliest obscure work, his poetry is filled with dramatic personae—bureaucrats, airmen, pulpiteers, spies—who address the reader in varying degrees of candor, delusion, and duplicity in verse (and occasionally prose) monologues. Auden's more reliable narrators are frequently intrusive. Gesturing one way or another, they direct our attention: "Look there, at this island now." Others stand removed, with arms crossed, commenting on the action like the chorus of a play: "Consider this and in our time / As the hawk sees it or the helmeted airman." Some poems are clearly songs, popular and thumping: "Beethameer, Beethameer, bully of Britain, / With your face as fat as a farmer's bum."

Auden's work is more discursive than descriptive. The imperative mood assumes an audience: his poetry has something to say. He draws the reader—just as he himself was increasingly drawn—into the public discourse of the 1930s. The theater provided him with the broad and popular audience his poetry was looking for. The subtitles he gave his plays—"charade," "parable," "morality," "masque"—suggest how he was looking beyond the naturalism of conventional theater for more symbolic and didactic forms.

The obvious influence was Brecht, whose *Threepenny Opera* Auden first saw in Berlin, where he and Isherwood were living in 1928-29, and whose poetry he greatly admired. Auden wasn't interested in character analysis or plot; both, he said, were the province of the novel. "Dramatic characters," he wrote, should be "simplified; easily recognizable and over-life size." His plots are familiar and formulaic. "The audience, like the child listening to the fairy tale, ought to know what is going to happen next." Isherwood once noted that "if Auden had his way, he would turn every play into a cross between grand opera and high mass." (It was, in 1937, a prescient comment; Auden went on to write the Christmas "Oratorio," *For the Time Being*, and several libretti.)

Although daunting in their diversity and in their sheer abundance, the plays in this volume might be described as tentative answers to a question that Auden posed in his long poem *The Orators* (1933), and repeatedly asked in different ways throughout the troubled decade: "What do you think about England, this country of ours where nobody is well?" As elsewhere in his poetry, Auden frames his question (and his many attempts at an answer) in terms of pathology. Society is sick, and it is the poet's job to provide a diagnosis. Still, Auden isn't prescriptive. The powers he ascribes to the poet are insight and exigency: to "make," as he writes in a poem to Isherwood, "action urgent and its nature clear." As the hero explains in one version of *The Dog Beneath the Skin*: "I can't dictate to you what to do. . . . I can only try to show you what you are doing and so force you to choose. For choice is what you are afraid of. . . . Fear of growth is making you ill."

At first the illness that Auden perceived around him was psychological—the private consequences of a public chaos, confined primarily to English shores. But as the 1930s progressed and a second war approached, Auden began to view the isolationism of his early poetry as the symptom of a greater societal disease. He extended his query to the broader realm of Europe and the more urgent claims of political crisis. His plays swiftly advance with events from a "charade" to a "morality" to a "tragedy"—just as his poetry moves from private to more public forms, and, at the decade's end, to elegy. Not surprisingly, the three plays that best illustrate this shift of emphasis and tone are the most interesting of the volume: *Paid on Both Sides*; the morality, *The Dog Beneath the Skin*; and the tragedy, *The Ascent of F6*.

Still, asking "the hard question," Auden concedes in *The Fronny*, "is simple / The simple act of the confused will." Finding the solution is what's "hard / And hard to remember," and this difficulty is the central concern of *Paid on Both Sides*, the initial work in this volume. Eliot first published the "charade" in the January 1930 issue of *The Criterion*, when Auden was 23. Eliot thought it a "brilliant piece of work," and by the next year William Empson, reviewing the play in the Cambridge magazine *Experiment*, was already acknowledging that it had "the sort of completeness that makes a work seem to define the attitude of a generation."

The one-act play in prose and verse tells the story of a blood-feud between two mine-owning families, the Nowers and the Shaws. After several skirmishes, the feud ends with the promise of marriage between Anne Shaw and John Nower, the hero whose hatred is extracted by a farcical surgeon in a surrealistic dream sequence—a charade within the charade. But Nower's cure alone cannot arrest the hatred, which is passed on to each successive generation like a disease. As Mendelson quotes from Auden's journal: "The neurosis involves all society." At the instigation of his vindictive mother, Seth Shaw breaks the truce and ambushes the wedding party before the ceremony. The feud resumes. The play ends on a tragic note: "Though he believe it, no man is strong." The past undoes the present. "His mother and her mother won." The battle lines of the play are psychological, rather than overtly political: an allegory of the general hatreds and fears that divide men.

The chorus, removed from the grim action of the play, imagines a new life beyond the frontier—the watershed in much of Auden's early verse between present conditions and those of a future and better world. But stuck on this side of the border, Auden can only envision the new life as a departure from the old; we see the dedication to the new life, but not its fulfillment. The chorus can only imagine the initial gestures of commit-

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ment, as in this lyric, central to the play:

> To throw away the key and walk away
> Not abrupt exile, the neighbours asking why,
> But following a line with left and right,
> An altered gradient at another rate
> . . . All pasts
> Are single old past now, although some posts
> Are forwarded, held looking on a new view;
> The future shall fulfill a surer vow
> Not smiling at queen over the glass rim
> Not making gunpowder in the top room,
> Not swooping at the surface still like gulls
> But with prolonged drowning shall develop gills.

Auden erects his vision on negative constructions. All he knows about the future world is that it will differ from the present—"a new view," "another rate," "a surer vow." And since that change involves, as he writes in one poem of the period, "a change of heart," or of human nature, the agent of change is less political than miraculous: the sport of nature of the stanza's last line. Like so many of his contemporaries during the 1930s, Auden strongly believed that the world he knew was coming to a convulsive end, but he couldn't yet conceive of what might replace it.

Auden soon took issue, however, with the private and psychological emphasis of his own early verse. "Do not speak of a change of heart, meaning five hundred a year and a room of one's own, / As if that were all that is necessary," a more urgent and political chorus chides in *The Dog Beneath the Skin*. "In these islands alone there are some forty-seven million hearts, each of four chambers." Auden's political awakening was partly due to Isherwood, who had watched Hitler's rise to power in Berlin. *The Dog Beneath the Skin* was their first collaboration, completed after several drafts in 1935, and it is by far the best and the most entertaining of the plays.

The lucky hero of this quest play is Alan Norman, who is chosen by lot by his provincial Edwardian village to find Francis Crewe, the only son and missing heir of the late Sir Bingham Crewe (who promised in his will that whoever found his son would receive half his land and his daughter's hand in marriage). Like the fortunate hero in the traditional fairy tale, Alan receives help and guidance from the least likely of sources, a dog who accompanies him on his journey and turns out to be Francis in disguise. (Francis had been observing the village from "a dog's eye view" all along, and his presence implies a critique of class attitudes: "As a dog, I learnt what a mixture of fear, bullying, and condescending kindness you treat those whom you consider your inferiors, but on whom you are dependent for your pleasures. It's an awful shock to start seeing people from underneath.")

The play largely consists of Alan and Francis's journey across the Channel to two imagined European countries: Ostnia, a repressive monarchy, where the king puts prisoners to death with rather cheerful reluctance, and Westland, fashioned after Hitler's Germany. The quest lends plausibility to the plot, but each adventure is actually symbolic, a satirical sketch of the decadent and destructive atmosphere of Europe between the wars. In Westland, for instance, the pair encounters an asylum of lunatics who listen intently to a portrait of their Leader, who has a loudspeaker for a face.

The play is episodic, like skits in a musical revue. (Auden's songs were originally set to music, many ironically to popular tunes.) But in contrast to *Paid on Both Sides*, the choruses of *The Dog Beneath the Skin* are integral to the drama. In characteristic imperatives, the chorus warns the audience of an insular complacency toward worsening conditions in Europe: "Do not comfort yourself with the reflection, 'How very unEnglish' / . . . already like an air-bubble under a microscope-slide, the film of poverty is expanding / And soon it will reach your treasure and your gentlemanly behaviour." But the precepts remain general: "Observe, therefore, and be more prepared than our hero."

Eventually Alan and Francis return to their English village to find it transformed into a fascist state. In a sermon written by Auden, the sinister Vicar addresses the newly formed Youth Brigade at a rally, encouraging its members to join God's ranks in the epic battle against Evil. The speech (originally published separately as "Sermon by an Armament Manufacturer") is a marvelous satire of high-pulpit religious and patriotic histrionics—"the best thing," Isherwood judged, "in the whole play." In rhetoric that becomes increasingly agitated and obscure, the Vicar preaches:

> What was the weather on Eternity's worst day? . . . The divinest of books says nothing. Of the primary crises of the soul no history is ever written. Yon citizen crossing the street while the policeman holds up the traffic like the Red Sea: he leaves the curb an honest man; but, ah, quickly, Constable, handcuffs out! Roll on, you heavy lorries! He is Pharaoh! Mercifully exterminate this pest! Too late. . . . It's done, the poison administered, the soul infected. The other curb is reached. . . .

Denouncing the Vicar, Alan and Francis reveal themselves and lead a group of rebels to join "the army of the other side."

Or at least that is how the play originally ended. Mendelson has chosen for the main text of this volume a later version of the final scene—a version that was never published or staged in Auden's lifetime (it was further emended for performance). He omits the Vicar's sermon and relegates it to a variant in what amounts to a footnote. Auden was, admittedly, always dissatisfied with the ending to the play; as late as 1953, he conducted a contest for his students at Smith to see who could come up with the best revision of the final scene. Still, without the fascist rally with the Vicar's sermon at its center, the play ends particularly poorly. The villagers seem merely provincial rather than evil; and the final act becomes anticlimactic, concluding with a speech by Francis that is more explicit but less interesting dramatically.

Auden obviously meant the Vicar's sermon for posterity. *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, including the Vicar's speech, was twice reprinted during his lifetime, and the sermon was one of the few pieces from the play that Auden reprinted in later collections. It is one of the best ex-

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amples of his dramatic monologues in prose, which, like Browning's monologues, capture their speakers' brilliant lunacy while exposing their evasions and their delusions of grandeur. Mendelson's decision to exclude it from the main text of the collected works seems unfortunate, and contrary to Auden's wishes.

Although more successful in standard dramatic terms, Auden and Isherwood's next-to-last collaboration, *The Ascent of F6*, is a disappointment after the vigors of *The Dog Beneath the Skin*. A conventional tragedy (loosely based on the career of T. E. Lawrence), it traces the development of a single character—a departure from the symbolic nature of Auden's earlier plays. Michael Ransom is the hero, an extraordinary and charismatic mountaineer whom the Colonial Office recruits to lead an expedition up the deadly F6, which lies on the border of Ostnia and Sinoland—where England and Ostnia both have colonial ambitions. Ostnia has launched its own expedition and several scenes cut to Mr. and Mrs. A., who follow the progress of the climbs on the radio with nationalistic fervor.

At first Ransom refuses to accept the mission. But, deluding himself into thinking that he can pursue his own private motives for the climb without playing into the hands of Fleet Street and the Colonial Office, he relents at the request of his mother, whose approval he still desperately seeks. Once the setting moves to the mountain face, the play becomes a psychological meditation on the corruptions of fame. Suffering from delusions of grandeur, Ransom pushes himself and his fellow climbers to continue the ascent despite hazardous conditions. All eventually perish, with Ransom the last to die, alone at the summit, in the imagined arms of his mother.

Despite the political premise of the plot, Auden doesn't suggest, as in the earlier plays, a correlation between the roots of his hero's individual frailties and the political realities of the play. Ransom's demise—due to an unresolved Oedipal complex and a lust for fame—is not emblematic of the underlying problems of an imagined Europe. Here Ostnia is not the symbolic land of decadence and violence it is in *The Dog Beneath the Skin* but simply a competitive foreign power. Isherwood's straightforward plot of colonial ambitions seems slightly at odds with Auden's psychodrama of Ransom, whose internal monologues are always straining to break into verse. Limited by a less densely layered and conventional plot, by realistic dialogue, and by his focus on a single character, Auden is incapable of stepping back and drawing the larger connections and lessons he does with the choruses and occasional verse of the earlier plays. In *The Ascent of F6*, his poetical gifts go largely to waste.

Because they contain the most and the best of Auden's poetry, *Paid on Both Sides* and *The Dog Beneath the Skin* are the most successful works in the volume. Isherwood's influence on the plays was sobering. While Auden provided what Isherwood called the "woozy" parts of their collaborations, his own contribution was more prosaic: the novelist's gifts of character and plot. But as the ratio of prose to poetry grows in the later plays, one begins to miss Auden's "wooziness." His exquisite light verse is what lends the dramatic writings much of their interest and vitality. Take, as just one example from this volume, the song of a Roman soldier from *Hadrian's Wall*, a program for the wireless written by Auden for the BBC in 1937. In a few lines, Auden captures the mundane concerns and dialect of a soldier, bored by his endless and uneventful watch at an isolated outpost:

> Over the heather the wet wind blows
> I've lice in my tunic and a cold in my nose.
>
> The rain comes pattering out of the sky
> I'm a Wall soldier; I don't know why.
>
> The mist sweeps over the hard gray stone
> My girl's in Tungria; I sleep alone.
>
> Aulus goes hanging around her place
> I don't like his manners; I don't like his face.
>
> Piso's a Christian; he worships a fish;
> There'd be no kissing if he had his wish.
>
> She gave me a ring but I diced it away;
> I want my girl and I want my pay.
>
> When I'm a veteran with only one eye,
> I shall do nothing but gaze at the sky.

Auden once said that a poet writes "to tell the truth." But also, he added, "to amuse his friends." That Auden manages to do both, as in the lyric above, is a part of his achievement, one too easily and too often underrated. As farce and fairy tale show, serious theater needn't be tragic, or even great, to be good. Auden's notions of what drama should be—popular in appeal and parabolic in form—served the strengths of his light dramatic verse. The plays collected in this volume may not be masterpieces, but one suspects that they were not intended to be great. Their ambitions were more modest—to engage, to entertain, to enlighten—but they are not, for that reason, less valuable.

"So long as artists exist," Auden wrote,

> making what they please . . . even if it is not terribly good, even if it appeals to only a handful of people, they remind the Management of something managers need to be reminded of, that the managed are people with faces, not anonymous numbers, that *Homo Laborans* is also *Homo Ludens*. . . . The peasant may play cards in the evening while the poet writes verses, but there is one political principle to which they both subscribe, namely, that among the half-dozen or so things for which a man of honor should be prepared, if necessary, to die, the right to play, the right to frivolity is not the least.

Art shouldn't always be a solemn business. For their pleasure, as much as for their historical and literary interest, these plays deserve to be read and revived. Auden once observed that "masterpieces should be kept for the High Holidays of the Spirit." Here you will find poetry for every day of the year. •

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 6*

tial business with Japanese clients, it acts not as lobbyist or publicist but as legal counsel. I myself do not presently have any Japanese clients. The focus of my activity on the foreign investment issue is the Association for International Investment, which is composed of U.S. firms, U.S. subsidiaries of foreign firms (all but one are European, by the way), and U.S. state and local governments.

I am chairman of the Hitachi Foundation, a U.S.-based philanthropic foundation with a U.S. board and officers, and the Japan-American Society of Washington, Inc. Neither seeks to influence government policy.

ELLIOT L. RICHARDSON
Washington, D.C.

John B. Judis replies:

In a telephone interview, Candace Crandall, CSIS's public affairs director, explicitly affirmed that Toyota officials were "consulted" about who would be appointed to the chair that the company endowed. Also, one of the persons who held the chair told me that Toyota was consulted about a successor.

According to the Justice Department, Elliot Richardson's law firm is an agent of the Embassy of Japan and Japan Tobacco Inc. According to a spokesman from Richardson's Association for International Investment, the organization does seek to influence government policy, and one of its first members was the American subsidiary of a Japanese firm, the name of which the association refuses to disclose.

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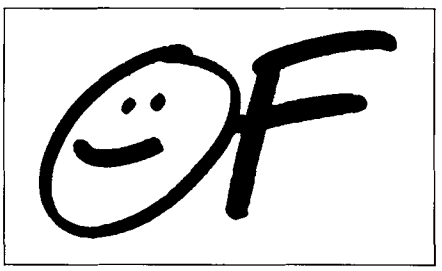
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Life imitates art

"THE VELVET REVOLUTION," AS Vaclav Havel has been calling the Czech miracle, is certainly not a catchphrase that any Western political consultant (of whom there are now hordes in Prague) would have endorsed. Sounds too much like punk art, or maybe a coup d'état by interior decorators. Obviously Havel had something else in mind, but the etymology is a little obscure. There's the iron-hand-in-velvet-glove antecedent (coined, supposedly, by Charles V): the Czech people were deceptively gentle in striking down their rulers. The more likely source of the phrase is not a king but a book by a dissident in another country, the Hungarian Miklós Haraszti. *The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism* (published in English in 1987 by New Republic Books) is a reflection on the "new culture of censorship," on the subtle ways in which artists themselves are complicit in state control. Havel too, in his New Year's Day address, emphasized everyone's subtle complicity in the old regime: "All of us have become accustomed to the totalitarian system, accepted it as an unalterable fact and thereby kept it running." I suppose that calling an escape from the velvet prison a velvet revolution is a way of celebrating the other, liberating face of complicity: once everyone rejects the system, however quietly, it will stop running. Still, as a sound bite, the phrase is hopeless. After all, this is the age of the preliterate political metaphor ("the Ultimate Cookie Monster," etc.), a trying time for a playwright-president.

NO ONE CAN FAULT THE LOGO of Civic Forum (Občanské Fórum)—the democratic coalition that led the revolution in Czechoslovakia—for being overly sophisticated. (See picture.) Just when you thought the have-a-nice-day smile was on the way out, it's back—at least at TNR it is, on buttons pinned to everybody's bulletin board. They were passed around during a visit to the magazine by Ivan Havel, the president's brother and a member of the steering committee of Civic Forum, and Martin Palous, Civic Forum's foreign policy spokesman. Listening to them, I had to blush for American politics and politicians; the Czechs are talking about true citizen participation, and their standards are high. But looking at their logo, I had to blush a little for them. The banality of evil overthrown, they've stumbled on the very symbol of the banality of goodness. Reinterpreting the hackneyed image is a challenge to perception, like trying to see the duck when your eye has gotten used to seeing the



rabbit: take the vapid smile that has summed up the I'm OK, you're OK culture of complacent America and try to see it as the smile of a nation bent on renewing itself. The Czechs know they're not OK, but they're grinning at all the work to be done. Have a tough decade!

IT'S A COMMONPLACE THAT CONtemporary American novelists are intimidated by the newspapers, that "actuality is constantly outdoing our talents," as Philip Roth said in "Writing American Fiction." But every so often the unreality of American life may afford novelists some small satisfaction: occasionally fiction does get there first. It's not so surprising when contemporary journalistic fiction manages the feat; when, say, Tom Wolfe's black activist/media manipulator Reverend Bacon in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* beats the Rev. Al Sharpton to the scene. (The Tawana Brawley case broke three months *after* the novel came out, as Wolfe recently reminded us in his essay "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast.") It's more notable when life and journalism imitate fiction half a century old, as they have in the Stuart murder case in Boston. I couldn't shake a sense of déjà vu as I pored over the press accounts: Where had I read this story before? In *An American Tragedy* (1925), suggested Richard Lingeman, Theodore Dreiser's biographer, in an op-ed piece. Behind Charles Stuart lurks Clyde Griffiths, another man on the rise who was desperate, and elaborate, in his plan to escape a pregnant woman. Dreiser had the plot a long time ago, and he also saw the underlying drama—the enduring perversities of American-style ambition. I'd like to chalk this up as a bracing victory for fiction—except that Dreiser didn't actually beat reality to the scene. Back in the days when novelists weren't intimidated by newspapers, he based his story on the famous Chester Gillette-Grace Brown murder case. Think of a comparable undertaking today, and you'll understand why novelists don't bother. A month or so from now, the first quickie chronicles of the Stuart case will already be out; a year from now the stream will be a flood. "My impression is there will be no book of real value," one editor said. The real mystery is, why do nonfiction writers bother?

MY FAVORITE LIFE-IMITATES-ART story lately is a more obscure case, *Tyler* v. *Berodt*. A few weeks ago the Supreme Court refused to hear it, but John Cheever would have liked it. On Father's Day in 1983, according to a *Washington Post* account of the case, Scott Tyler of Dixon, Iowa, was given a great "new gadget," a cordless telephone. It turned out, however, to be no ordinary appliance. Whenever the Tylers dialed their new phone, the cordless phone in Sandra and Rich Berodt's house a few blocks away rang and purred. Whenever the Tylers talked, the Berodts' phone picked up their conversations. Sandra and Rich began listening in. And why not? Such a temptation is irresistible, as Cheever showed in his story "The Enormous Radio" (1947), about the new radio Jim Wescott bought for his wife, Irene. It didn't take long before Irene, frustrated at first that she couldn't coax any music out of the box, was enthralled by its unconventional powers: it picked up voices in apartments all over her building. She couldn't stop eavesdropping, upsetting though she found the conversations—full of cruelty, hypocrisy, dishonesty, and squabbling about money. Sandra too found the talk she heard upsetting—and here Cheever would have relished the updated details. One day she thought she caught Scott (who was a food distributor) talking about "a white load" (he actually said "a light load"). Certain that he was referring to cocaine, she called the police. With the blessing of the county sheriff's office, the Berodts then began taping the Tylers' conversations. They didn't record any drug deals, but they did discover other dishonesties: Scott was soon nabbed for stealing merchandise from his company. Cheever's story closed as a fable for the 1940s and '50s: the radio got fixed, and the Wescotts suddenly heard themselves sounding just like their neighbors, Jim squabbling with Irene behind closed doors, worried about money. Naturally, "The Enormous Telephone" has taken a litigious turn: the Tylers filed suit against the Berodts, charging violation of their constitutional rights and of federal wiretapping law. But out of court, I suspect the scene is the same. As the eavesdroppers pay the price of their pastime, Rich Berodt is surely squabbling with Sandra ("*White* load? Honey, if you had to listen, at least you could have heard it right!"). And burdened by legal fees, they're panicked about money.

ANN HULBERT

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